
In Diversity's Holy Name: The Case for Faith-Based Scholarship at the University of Minnesota

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In the veritable torrent of ink spilled by those who love their state's flagship university, nothing is more certain to arouse passions and end polite conversation than the discussion of religion. Nevertheless, it is in the realm of religion that a path opens for the University of Minnesota to become a *distinctively* great public university. Religion—more specifically, faith-based scholarship and other activities—can reinvigorate campus intellectual life and produce the ethical leadership that

our state needs, without institutional dogma and discrimination.

The problem is that our university has strayed from its land-grant mission to provide practical *and* liberal education (“liberal” in this context should be music for conservative ears, because it connotes freedom), to make its graduates and our state both wealthier and wiser. Today, it's all about wealth, with relatively little instruction about wise and ethical living.

Why? Our policy makers value economic development, and thus favor

research (where the economic payoff is fairly probable) and hire outstanding faculty accordingly. At the same time, the underlying intellectual assumptions that guide classroom instruction have little to offer in terms of a liberal education that helps produce wise and ethical citizens.

Do Minnesotans value pocketbooks more than minds and hearts? I don't think so, but unless we face the fact that economic vitality cannot long abide intellectual and moral poverty, we will not have a world-class university.

My love affair with the University of Minnesota is that of a passionate advocate who knows that we can do better in the area we so successfully ignore. I moved here seventeen years ago to work with a private organization serving the thousands of international students who help make the U the third-best public research university in the country (according to one recent study). Eight years later I began pouring my energies into a Christian study center next to campus, offering, among other programs, lectures by leading Christian scholars.

As a doctoral student in the very same department where Mitch Pearlstein won his Ph.D. more than twenty years ago, I've witnessed among my professors a work ethic that would make every Minnesotan proud. It's no wonder that they and over 3,000 other faculty members successfully hauled in over half a billion dollars in research funding in 2001. In an era of declining public support for the U, taxpayers need to know that we can milk these high-

producing cows only so long before they scamper off to better pastures.

As you will see, the intellectual and moral impoverishment of universities like ours is troubling. Rediscovery of faith-informed scholarship that relates formal religious beliefs to scholarship¹ can bring the university back to its land-grant mission, restore the balance that's been lost, and, in so doing, propel our university to greatness.

Intellectual and Moral Impoverishment

Mitch Pearlstein, in his sterling "Can the University of Minnesota Become Truly 'World Class'?" (*American Experiment Quarterly*, Spring 2002) starts from the premise that "a first-rate University of Minnesota is very much in this state's self-interest." He wonders whether Minnesotans' populist demands for equality of access, our relatively small population, and the realities of institutional empire building will make it hard for the U to make it to the very top. One of his prominent concerns is that our university, like most universities, is not the intellectually open institution we would like to think it is.

Besides intellectual impoverishment, we should also be concerned about moral impoverishment in our university. Despite dramatic increases in enrollment since World War II, our social problems (in Minnesota and across the country) multiplied almost exponentially between 1960 and 1990 (roughly leveling off, at very high levels historically, since then). For all the research on every conceivable aspect of

our problems, most citizens see us no closer to solving our biggest problems, which include transportation gridlock, poorly performing schools, international terrorists, persistent inner-city poverty and violence, and a generalized sense of high stress. Minnesotans are not as bad off as the rest of America, but we are not thriving, and our state's business, political, and civic leaders, many of them University of Minnesota graduates, are short on answers.

Several years ago, *Atlantic Monthly* magazine published a stunning cover story by Alston Chase, a former Macalester College philosophy professor, who tells how, through an exchange of letters, he nurtured a relationship with the Unabomber after Ted Kaczynski had been arrested.

Here was a precocious Midwestern boy who had gone off to Harvard, where things went wrong and the seeds of the Unabomber were planted. Chase contends that Harvard taught young Ted (as many universities teach) that "reason [is] a liberating force and faith mere superstition," but also that "absolute reason leads to absolute despair." Thus, the Unabomber acted rationally when he decided to fight modern science and technology, which he saw as evil. Chase concludes with a sobering observation about higher education today: "Despite their historically unprecedented affluence, many middle-class Americans, particularly the educated elite, are still gripped by despair. The education system continues to promote bleak visions of the future."²

Those "bleak visions" are the predictable result of two worldviews, or

underlying perspectives, that shape higher education today. The first is scientific naturalism, the view that matter is all there is and that the scientific method is our only means of knowing. This perspective, which was dominant when Kaczynski studied at Harvard, has enormous sway at our university as well, but in recent years it has been challenged by another worldview that doubts our ability to know everything scientifically. This more cynical perspective, called postmodernism, says that power manipulations are behind virtually everything we say and do. These worldviews not only fail to produce wise, ethically minded university graduates; in many ways, they also work at cross-purposes to the moral vision that our families and religious institutions work so hard to instill.

Kaczynski's tragic story is emblematic of our universities' failure to produce ethically minded leaders whose capacity to make wealth is matched by their wisdom.

The dean of our College of Liberal Arts, Steven Rosenstone, is similarly gloomy. He wrote on the occasion of the university's 2001 sesquicentennial celebration, "Something's wrong in the state of higher education. . . . We are, I believe, courting a kind of intellectual impoverishment that could imperil higher education for years to come."³ A leading East Coast academic, Stanley Aronowitz, offers a toasty metaphor: "Like a roach motel, the university will let students in, only to release them as intellectual corpses."⁴ These men, by the way, are not conservative academics.

Why should Minnesotans care about intellectual and moral impoverishment? And what can religion, traditionally thought to be the redoubt of mind-numbing dogmatism, offer?

Minnesotans *should* care that, as Rosenstone notes, “it’s become *passé* to talk about the love of learning” in favor of a practical, vocationally oriented education. Land-grant universities like ours, established by the 1862 Morrill Act, were chartered to offer not only practical education—education in agriculture and the “mechanical arts”—that would convey the skills needed for economic development, but also a liberal education, an intellectually stimulating pursuit of knowledge for the love of learning and the development of a moral life.

Practicality divorced from ethics can lead to hideous results: the Nazis’ use of unbelievably cruel and inhumane research methods in pursuit of Aryan racial purity is an example. Nor does an exclusive focus on the practical foster a vision for what has classically been known as “the good, the true, and the beautiful,” from which courageous, principled leadership is born.⁵ The Presidents’ Campaign for the Advancement of Liberal Learning, supported by more than 400 American college and university presidents (though President Mark Yudof of the University of Minnesota was not a signatory), aims to develop “intellectual and ethical judgment.”⁶ Academic roach motels not only destroy intellectual life, they also abominate moral and ethical vision.

Dean Rosenstone’s solution is to renew liberal arts education, which

means going back to core principles, focusing on areas of excellence, marketing the liberal arts vision, and continuing to enhance the research agenda. Unfortunately, he does not offer the compelling rationale for the renewal of liberal arts education that is needed to persuade the large majority of citizens who have lost the vision for the humanities and liberal arts.

He could have found it in that 150-year-old mother lode of all university studies: John Henry Newman’s master text from which all subsequent studies on university life like Rosenstone’s borrow the title, *The Idea of a University*.

Newman (for whom the Catholic-based Newman Centers were named) says, in short, that a truly liberal education *must* teach theology (what today we call religion) because it is a major part of knowledge, it can link the other disciplines together into unified knowledge, and it has a significant bearing on how society organizes its affairs.

Rosenstone borrowed Newman’s title for his own essay, but stripped the theological meat off Newman’s argument and used only the bones. We need to put religious flesh back on those bones, not by introducing doctrine and dogma (and thus incurring a deserved First Amendment slap) but by reinvigorating liberal education in order to renew intellectual life and to produce ethical leaders for society.

Christian Scholarship as a Test Case

How can faith-informed scholarship make the contribution I’m claiming for it? Since I write as a Christian, I offer

my religious perspective as a test case for academic objections to my proposition. Scholars from other religious traditions might offer answers from their own perspectives.

Promotion of Academic Freedom

Modern concern for academic freedom began not in some trendy coastal university, but right here at the University of Minnesota, early in the twentieth century.⁷ At issue was the freedom to investigate and to teach without fear that one's views will end one's academic career.

Why would Christian theism enhance academic freedom?

The Christian notion of the uncoerced conscience is a function of the belief that humans were created to be free, not robots or creatures of instinct. Christians have a "theology of conscience," wrote French theologian and social critic Jacques Ellul.⁸ God is no cosmic bully, with Jesus' followers as His police force, His academic Taliban.

Christianity also contributes to the pursuit of academic freedom by encouraging humility about knowledge. We are finite, a condition of our creation, and we are fallible, a condition of our sinfulness. Our knowledge is at times perverted, disorganized, clouded, mixed with passions, and, always, limited, which means we must be ready to hear others' contributions.

A Christian understanding of knowledge also involves community: we need communities in order to know. In academia this means peer review, discussion, exchange of letters, and debate. We need, rather than dogma (secular or

religious), debate and dialogue, which depend on academic freedom.

The problem, of course, is history. From the time of Constantine in 310 until the early twentieth century, the church welcomed the state's coercive powers to enforce Christian dogma among unwilling and courageous men and women of science and letters, like Copernicus.

Could it be that in our very secular era the problem is exactly reversed? Possessing the state's sword (its power to tax and thus reduce tuition in its schools), do our secular state universities enforce secular academic dogma on the consciences of religious students? I have no doubt that well over 95 percent of our faculty members have never considered this interpretation of academic life, and most would be truly alarmed to think of themselves as agents of coercion, enforcing secular perspectives at the expense of genuine religious alternatives.

Not only do Christian scholars have the potential to make great contributions to scholarship, but in this era when they no longer hold the levers of academic power, they may well be the **first** promoters of academic freedom.

Stimulation of Intellectual Discourse

Our academic institutions are less beehives of free-ranging discussion and inquiry than bastions of intellectual conformity, especially when it comes to notions of diversity and tolerance. Mitch Pearlstein writes: "Of all institutions, colleges and universities ought to be the first place to talk about tough

issues. Sometimes, though, they're just about the last. . . . Many students who do hold more traditional and conservative views, particularly on issues involving race, sexual orientation, and such, opt to keep their mouths shut in class, lest they be accused of 'insensitivity' or worse."

A student residence hall adviser recently told me that at last summer's orientation for eighty or so advisers, a primary focus was affirming alternative sexual behavior, such as homosexuality. She believes that at least twenty-five of the eighty fundamentally disagree with what was taught, but only one offered a public challenge. These twenty-five have no problem accepting those who are different; their problem is the university's expectation that they affirm and celebrate behavior they view as a moral evil.

There is at work here a simple law of all institutions, once true of state-established churches and now true of our secular public universities: once they gain and secure political power, they tend toward mind-stifling dogma and away from stimulating debate and discussion.

Why does Christian scholarship promise to stimulate intellectual discourse? Christianity valorizes the individual who holds to principle and personal conviction in the face of opposition: Jesus Christ, early church martyrs, Thomas More, Jan Hus, John Wycliffe, or the occasional knucklehead whose capacity for conviction and uncoerced conscience surpass his or her vision of civility. It takes rare courage to go against the flow.

And Christian scholarship fosters charity toward those with whom you differ. Loving your enemies means, at minimum, protecting their right to be wrong.

Christian thought takes a high view of the mind, starting with Jesus' command to love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your *mind* (Matthew 22:37). Human reason is a gift of God and must be applied to understanding the entirety of God and God's world.

Once again, we must face church history squarely and honestly. During the fifteen or sixteen centuries of Christian political domination, Christians lost the skill of principled, intellectually stimulating engagement with other worldviews. The lone, limited exception was the period from about 1400 to 1600. The academic debates (they were known as "disputations") of that era led to the classic showdown at Luther's Wittenberg University, setting the stage for the Protestant Reformation.

Only now, after a century during which much of Christian scholarship was in full retreat, are those skills being learned again. The challenge will be for Christians to take seriously their internal resources for positive dialogue and debate without grabbing and gaining political power.

Enhancement of Explanatory Capacities

Christian scholarship offers the academy added explanatory capacities. This is important to academics who are hard at work making sense of our world.

By and large, though, religion doesn't factor into their explanations, which means that it doesn't show up in their scholarship. So it wasn't surprising that in two of my graduate classes after 9/11, when it came to explaining "why" the terrorists rammed planes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, only one person mentioned the role of religion and the connection with Islamic fundamentalism. Yours truly.

When academics make satisfactory sense of reality, citizens benefit by their explanations, which ultimately lead to new technologies or better policies. Our current explanatory systems, shaped by secular worldviews, are full of gaps, especially concerning human behavior.

Christian scholarship can enlarge those capacities. It offers ultimate explanatory categories into which we may lump other phenomena that otherwise seem completely unrelated to the phenomenon in question. Planes that crash into the World Trade Center are connected, in this sense, to ravaging diseases. The two realities are fundamentally linked by the larger explanatory concept of "evil."

Christian scholarship also introduces explanatory categories that can supplement our existing knowledge. Consider our knowledge about trees. A botanist can give us scientific data about a tree. A psychologist can tell us what trees do for the human psyche. An economist can tell us that trees in our yards add to the value of our homes. But only in the scriptures that Jews and Christians share, the first several chapters of Genesis—the begin-

ning of the Torah—do we gain the knowledge that we are responsible to care for trees (which may include harvesting them when their capacities for life or other usefulness are over).

Christian scholarship often opens up new institutional possibilities for research. For example, a group of social scientists at the University of Pennsylvania are for the first time systematically studying the social outcomes of faith-based institutions.

Finally, Christian scholarship adds explanatory capacity because it calls attention to the pride, confusion, blindness, bias, and inappropriate judgments that most of us bring to knowledge. That's why the Bible emphasizes testing claims made by the religious and others (I John 4:1), steering clear of "clever tales" (II Peter 1:16), being alert for signs of exploitation in the name of religion (II Peter 2:3), and checking facts to make sure they are reliably supported (Luke 1:1–4).

Restoration of Moral Education

Duke University's Stanley Hauerwas, who sees academia as an inherently moral enterprise, is critical of what he sees: "The failure of the modern university is not that those teaching in it fail to shape students morally, but that we fail to take responsibility for doing so. . . . There is no way as teachers we can or should avoid being moral examples for our student."⁹ Even political correctness (avoiding actions that some see as excluding, marginalizing, or insulting disadvantaged groups) can be seen as a kind of moral education, albeit one that uses implied or real

threats to enforce tolerance and respect for diversity.

Christianity, like most major religions, has a large moral agenda. In brief, moral education from the Christian perspective begins with recognition of moral universals, or absolutes. Human beings in all places and at all times are accountable to the same standard, which is rooted in transcendence, that is, in a supreme Lawgiver. Transcendent moral law stands in judgment over, and as a guide to, human legal, economic, and political structures.

In a recent series of lectures sponsored by the MacLaurin Institute, Indian thinker and activist Vishal Mangalwadi presented a compelling argument that biblical ideas fostered a cultural climate that reduced kings' divine right to rule while endowing commoners with previously unknown rights and responsibilities. Translation of the Bible into vernacular languages, he said, was the most important catalyst for political freedom, economic growth, and scientific achievement in the past millennium.

Prospects for Religion at the University

Currently, religion is expressed in two ways at the University of Minnesota. An academic program in religious studies offers courses in religious traditions from Hinduism to Judaism to Zoroastrianism. In terms of campus life, there are more than sixty student organizations with a religious focus, often augmented by religious professionals from nationally based parachurch organizations. The university makes it easy

for these groups to organize, and, on occasion, even offers financial grants.¹⁰

What the religious studies program and student religious groups have in common is that they accept, in principle, a fundamental unwritten tenet of state-sponsored liberalism: their religious ideas and practices are private, and thus have little to do with the real academic work of the university. Even those who teach in religious studies must work largely on the basis of the nonreligious, or secular, assumptions implicit in scientific naturalism or post-modernism.¹¹ This academic arrangement, which pervades almost all of academia, I call ***reigning secularism***.

I propose an alternative arrangement in which academically qualified scholars whose research and teaching are informed by religious assumptions are welcomed to our faculties. This arrangement, which I call ***intellectual pluralism***, would be better public policy for the residents of Minnesota ***and*** good for academia because it would make the university a marketplace of ideas, a lively environment where good ideas are tested, debated, chosen, and finally lived within a moral framework.¹²

We need this kind of academic environment, fostered by the presence of faith-informed scholars, for a number of reasons.

Challenges to Citizenship

The moral and communal commitments necessary to sustain citizenship will, in the twenty-first century, be tested to their limits. The classical liberalism of the twentieth century, with its notions of tolerance, public reasoning

for the common good, and the absence of religious influence (theologian Richard John Neuhaus's "naked public square"),¹³ will not hold up under the weight of what is shaping up to be a very religious twenty-first century. We need sophisticated academic conversations that take these alternative worldviews seriously, fostering debate between and among them, so that we can develop the policy makers and public intellectuals who help us navigate what are, in light of 9/11, already very troubled waters.

Terrorist Threats

If we don't expose religious worldviews to the light of academic discourse, they will grow like moss under rocks. And when moss grows, other things collect, including terrorists. For this reason alone, I welcome Muslim scholarship into academia, provided we have open and public debates over our respective worldviews. Truth will, in most cases, win out, provided all views are exposed to light **and** the power of the public purse is not used to favor one over the other (which is presently the case, given the strict adherence to scientific naturalism and postmodernism in our universities).

Intellectual Diversity

Hiring faith-informed faculty would honor the claim to respect "intellectual diversity," as found in the University of Minnesota's 2001 statement on faculty tenure. In addition to the current faculty members whose scholarship reflects secular views of reality, qualified scholars from Christian, Jewish, Muslim,

Buddhist, and other religious traditions would be hired. Creating a campus atmosphere of open, honest debate and dialogue would allow these scholars' assumptions to refine each other and enhance our students' education.

Unexploited International Resources

The presence at the University of Minnesota of more than 4,000 students and scholars from around the world is a rich but currently unexploited resource for outstanding campus conversations: Hindu philosophy debated against that of the Muslim; a Buddhist perspective on science up against that of the scientific naturalist; the New Age view of medicine debated with a Christian view. As it is, these intellectual resources are squandered because our universities don't factor religion into the academic equation.

Policy for Faith-Informed Scholarship

What, in concrete terms, am I proposing? At least in the short term, it is this: hiring faith-informed faculty to fill newly endowed chairs; two pilot undergraduate curricular initiatives; and university-wide symposia for formal debate between leading scholars of differing worldviews and religions.

First, I propose that private donors endow chairs in religion and history, religion and economics, and so forth. Written provisos would stipulate that the chairs are for the hiring of religiously informed faculty who can make significant research, teaching, and service contributions to understanding the

relation between religion and their disciplines. Of course, prospective chair holders would need to demonstrate that they have produced high-quality scholarship and that they could increase the prestige of their departments.

The benefits of hiring faith-informed faculty might show up sooner than anticipated. There is no shortage of religious students looking around for faculty members under whom they can pursue graduate studies from within their religious perspective.¹⁴

The first curricular initiative would reinvigorate the Residential College program (in which students who live together in a dormitory share some of the same coursework) by appointing, in addition to a faculty member with a strong science background and a post-modern scholar in the liberal arts or social sciences, one or more faith-informed scholars. Together, this faculty cohort could, in the confines of the Residential College, develop an introductory course in comparative perspectives, start a debate forum, and otherwise infuse the program with the requisite intellectual disagreement necessary to challenge students to think about wise and ethical living.

Another pilot curricular initiative would develop the three-course sequence advocated by Warren Nord, a professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a tireless advocate for religion in public and higher education. Though he proposes courses in world religions, religion and modernity, and moral philosophy at the high school level, they are, I think,

better suited to college undergraduates. First-year students would be invited to voluntarily enroll in these courses (which could be constructed so as to fulfill elective and liberal education requirements without adding to students' academic and financial loads).

Because both programs would be voluntary, wary parents and students would not have to fear proselytization or otherwise seemingly coercive methods.

To pursue these curricular changes, the university would need to hire at least one scholar representing at least each of the five major religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism); some slots could be filled through endowed chairs. Also, these programs would need to be coordinated with the existing religious studies program.

After three years, the curricular initiatives would be thoroughly evaluated and further curricular decisions made accordingly.

Finally, I propose establishment of regular university-wide symposia at which leading scholars from around the world, representing particular secular or religious perspectives, would publicly debate their assumptions and their agendas.

Faculty Concerns about Faith-Informed Scholarship

Introducing a religious dimension into university education would raise concerns among faculty members. How would this play out?

Many academics have a visceral dislike for the single most overtly religious

group in the United States and undoubtedly a prospective player with respect to faith-informed scholarship: evangelical Christians. A 1999 survey showed that 56 percent of highly educated Americans moderately or deeply dislike evangelicals,¹⁵ though the same group had a relatively positive view of Jews and Catholics. A 1988 survey revealed that 34 percent of academics considered evangelicals a “threat to democracy.”¹⁶ Negative images of televangelists and concerns that religious conservatives hold strong moral and political convictions perceived to be antithetical to pluralism, tolerance, and respect for multiple viewpoints may be behind this deep negativism. The imagery *is* a problem, but to say that strong beliefs are problematic in a democracy is to deny the due owed to our most principled leaders, from Abraham Lincoln to Paul Wellstone.

Religion inevitably lures out of its lair the perennial dragon of separation, walling off church from state. To say the least, this old dragon needs slaying, as constitutional scholar Philip Hamburger does in *Separation of Church and State*.¹⁷ Separation, says Hamburger, is a “twentieth-century myth”¹⁸ based on an 1802 letter written by President Thomas Jefferson. Though the concept is found nowhere in the U.S. Constitution, it has, for historical reasons, been used to *strictly* embargo religion from all aspects of public life, including academia. Separation has come to symbolize American freedom,¹⁹ even though Hamburger warns that the concept of separation should be viewed with “suspicion.”²⁰ While the U.S.

Supreme Court’s rulings have favored strict separation since the late 1940s, in recent years there has been a clear trend toward accommodation of religion in public contexts, most notably last June, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Cleveland’s school voucher program is constitutional.

Many within academia believe that separation is the only alternative to the union of church and state, or theocracy. The terrorist tragedy of 9/11 has even increased such fears. Policy regarding religion in public institutions will continue to be shaped by such fears unless advocates of religiously informed scholarship in public higher education can make the case that the academic ideal is neither theocracy, on the one hand, nor, on the other, the strictly secular perspectives that currently dominate universities, but a third alternative that envisions universities becoming intellectually thriving centers of healthy debate and discussion among secular and faith-informed scholars of all stripes.

An intellectually stimulating university *demand*s all the major players at the academic table, whether they are atheists, Jews, Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, or Muslims. The university must have a strong and effective policy that rules out explicit or implicit discrimination on the basis of beliefs. Those who wish to pursue scholarship from explicitly religious perspectives are currently unwelcome at that table, at least when it comes to faculty hiring and curriculum design.

Academics fear that faith-informed scholarship will undermine academia’s

independent, nonsectarian, objective pursuit of knowledge. Similarly, others fear that scientific research, which has had enormous successes, might be crushed by the weight of religious dogma.²¹ Knowledge is *not* “value-free,” nor is pure objectivity and rationality possible. So it may be that many academics’ underlying fear, then, is not the loss of objectivity, but the imposition of a perspective that they may not share or that they believe will undermine scholarship within their disciplines.

George Marsden, a Notre Dame history professor and an academic lightning rod on faith-informed scholarship in higher education, joins Warren Nord in reassuring academics. They propose, respectively, notions of procedural rationality and professional competence. Faculty members need to be able to “honor some basic rules of evidence and argument”²² and meet certain academic criteria, such as the ability to pursue scholarship utilizing rather universal notions of human reason.²³ Simply, each discipline has basic rules for establishing a claim, and any worthy scholar, religious or otherwise, needs to be able to follow them.

The Public Good and Religion at the U of M

From a policy perspective, there is one simple question to ask about the University of Minnesota: Does it serve the legitimate interests of the citizens of Minnesota? If the public good is economic development, the answer is “absolutely yes.” The problem, as we have seen, is that land-grant institutions are commissioned to provide *both*

“liberal and practical education,” that is, education that both promotes high ideals in our future leaders and furnishes them with the skills to help our state grow economically. The former provides the cultural capital so that the latter produces financial capital. You can’t have one without the other: a market without morality ends in banditry, while morality without a market ends in poverty.

Dean Rosenstone rightly warns that we’ve fixated on the market as the rationale for our university, but he has not considered the possibility that welcoming religiously informed scholarship is the surest way to restore the liberal education he wants and the morality we need.

This brings us to Minnesota’s citizens. Minnesotans are exceptionally religious by all standards (with the sixth-highest rate of religious membership among the fifty states),²⁴ but can the same be said of their university? Hardly. The result is alienation from the institution to which all Minnesotans are indebted, because it seems so far away culturally. It’s no wonder that evangelical parents fear that their children will lose their faith in college.²⁵ If even 10 percent of Minnesota’s taxpayers feel this way, is it surprising that support for the university is tepid?

My point is that there is no academic or political reason that a very religious state’s university should not employ some high-quality scholars whose views of reality are more like those of its citizens. This might just create enthusiasm for the university.

What about evidence that might yield clues as to the viability of such a proposal? No other state university has been willing to venture into this territory, but Minnesotans are used to leading the way in many fields, including charter schools. My proposal for a faculty initiative involves, initially, only private funds, and my proposed curricular initiatives are meant to be pilot programs for investigating the feasibility, desirability, and institutional suitability of similar programs in the future.

The evidence indicates that well over 25 percent of students come to college having had a significant religious experience²⁶ and that religion is a significant factor in shaping student attitudes toward social policy.²⁷ As for ethics, a recent poll shows that:

Although 97% of all seniors believe college has equipped them to perform ethically in their future professional lives, when asked which statement about ethics was most often transmitted by their professors 73% selected the proposition "what is right and wrong depends on differences in individual values and cultural diversity," as opposed to only 25% who picked "there are clear and uniform standards of right and wrong by which everyone should be judged."²⁸

According to criteria applied by 73 percent of these students' professors, a society that burns widows alive, executes homosexuals, prohibits the education of women, and shoots its professors is morally equivalent to one that does not. Does this kind of education make wise and moral leaders?

Is my strategy for restoring wholeness to education at the University of Minnesota feasible, politically and financially? On the financial side, the university would probably need to hire a minimum of five new faculty members, scattered among various departments but freed, in terms of their teaching loads, to work with the two proposed pilot programs (Residential College and elective three-course sequence). In addition, approximately five administrative and support staff members would be needed to launch the entire initiative. The prospect of gaining foundation funding for such a daring initiative is rather high, given the interest of several national funding organizations.²⁹

The politics are daunting, because the university as an institution is conservative and loath to change.³⁰ Thus, the faculty would have to embrace the idea that faith-informed scholarship is good for our university. For their part, administrators and regents would need to see that welcoming religiously informed scholarship would win a renewed measure of public support and funding for the university.

This raises the question of fairness. With the hiring since at least the mid-1970s of faculty members who hold a variety of perspectives (postmodern, critical theorist, feminist, and so forth), what stands in the way of the university's hiring Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu faculty members whose scholarly perspectives are distinctively shaped by their religious worldviews? This is a policy of fairness: faith-informed scholars who demonstrate

scholarly acumen and accomplishment deserve equal consideration in hiring and tenure decisions. As academic historian George Marsden writes, "There is no reason why it should be a rule of academia that *no* religious viewpoint shall receive serious consideration."³¹

Objections

Let me anticipate—and answer—some other likely objections to faith-informed scholarship at the University of Minnesota.

There are plenty of private religious colleges, where faith-informed scholarship is welcome. Why don't those who care about this go to those schools?

Minnesota taxpayers fund about one-third of the university's budget, thus giving the university a competitive edge over private colleges that must raise all their own funds. Is it fair to expect those who can't afford high private college tuition to forgo the option of pursuing at least some of their studies with scholars whose religious faith shapes their teaching and research?

More importantly, the University of Minnesota has extraordinary cultural authority,³² which effectively means that many of our best and brightest conceive of politics, business, economics, and society in public terms that contradict the private religious beliefs of a majority of Minnesotans.

Why not let churches and families deal with morality and public ethics? After all, only the university is suited to be our common agent of economic development.

Once again, I call on Dean Rosenstone, who says we are mistaken when

we think that fattening our collective wallet is a "core purpose of a university" when, in fact, economic development is the "by-product." The virtues of hard work, politeness, willingness to engage in largely civil debate, honesty, frugality, sacrifice for the larger good—all the virtues that helped make Minnesota great—are, to a large extent, learned implicitly or explicitly in our churches, synagogues, and mosques. We must not underestimate this: Minnesotans as *individuals* owe a great deal to these institutions.

But why should our university disengage itself from that same task? And where will we find a better platform for members of different religious and non-religious communities to come together to debate their visions for society? The task of forming a public conscience does not belong solely to our religious communities, though they have an enormous role to play; it belongs to all of us, and it behooves our premier university to step up to the plate and become a positive, proactive agent of moral education.

I'm simply calling for development of an intellectual culture at the University of Minnesota that openly acknowledges that education is truly about ethics, values, and visions of the good society, and for inclusion of explicitly religious perspectives in the academic mix. Is there anything inherently unfair and illegitimate about this, from a public policy perspective?

What will you do with religious perspectives that are less than mainstream in Minnesota—Islam and Buddhism, for example? Aren't you opening Pandora's

box when you admit religiously informed scholarship?

Every new policy is an experiment, and every experiment comes with risks. The risks are minimal, however.

By welcoming nonmainstream faith-informed scholars into the academy, we test the validity and worthiness of their worldviews. All religions claim to possess good ideas; the best way we have to discover their worthiness (or unworthiness) is to subject them to academic debate.

Nor would academics from minority religious perspectives stand alone; they would share departments with large numbers of scholars from secular or majority religious perspectives who would critique and evaluate their work according to scholarly standards.

Finally, this is a matter of fairness for all, provided they are qualified scholars in their field. What should *not* happen is that we develop some sort of proportional representation for each faith perspective, in which case scholarship would take a backseat to group representation.

Ultimately you will drive us back into the dark ages of dogma and antirationism, and you will drive out our best scholars.

To put it mildly, this prospect seems laughable. It's simply bad public policy, as well as very bad academic practice, to exclude multiple viewpoints from what should be an intellectually vibrant marketplace of competing ideas.

This proposal is not about turning the university into a theocracy run by like-minded monks and religious fanatics; rather, it offers a way to make ours a distinctively great institution whose

pursuit of genuinely liberal learning results in graduates whose principled, ethical vision for Minnesota has as much to do with our collective good as with private commercial success. This university is filled with outstanding atheistic and agnostic professors whom we cannot afford to lose in that quest, and who will make our conversations that much more interesting.

The American Association of University Professors, in its 1982 "Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure" says that an academic institution must be "a marketplace of ideas, and it cannot fulfill its purposes of transmitting, evaluating, and extending knowledge if it requires conformity with any orthodoxy of content and method."³³ Sounds like an invitation to religiously informed scholarship, doesn't it?

You speak of religion's being essential to the development of ethical leaders. But which moral vision? Buddhist, Hindu, postmodern, Christian?

C. S. Lewis wrote that a universal moral thread weaves its way through the world's religions. This moral thread, which he called the "tao," or way, includes respect for life, fairness, and honesty.

To the degree that the moral visions of the worldviews conflict, we should let the faculty and students wrestle openly with the moral implications of what is taught. I cannot imagine this situation being any more serious than the general absence of moral education.

Religion has no place in a modern research university. Religious explanations are nothing more than "God-of-the-gaps":

anything for which science doesn't offer a complete explanation is attributed to God.

The problem with this accusation against faith-informed researchers is that very few are guilty, primarily because the academy is so severe toward "God-of-the-gaps." Just ask the Intelligent Design theorists. They have rigorously set forth criteria that can be used to distinguish random events from the "specified complexity" that is the telltale characteristic of design. Rather than fearing that "God-of-the-gaps" will be tolerated in modern research, we should be asking why atheistic and other scholars are so adamant in stifling the legitimate inquiry undertaken by Intelligent Design theorists.³⁴

Conclusion

Dean Steven Rosenstone is right when he says that universities like ours risk "intellectual impoverishment" by focusing increasingly on economic and workforce development at the expense of liberal education. A great university cannot grow on the grave of intellectual death.

We must return to the original mission of land-grant universities, combining liberal education—education that fosters a vision of the good, the true, and the beautiful, that is, education without cash value but with enormous cultural value—with pragmatic, skills-oriented education that showers society with economic benefits.

The way back to a healthy blend of liberal and practical education will require a forward-looking welcome to faith-informed scholarship, which can rejuvenate the intellectual climate of

the university **and** restore a vision for the moral education that helps produce graduates with ethical bearings strong enough to resist raiding the corporations they lead and sacrificing the public good for their private benefit.

This vision for a distinctively great University of Minnesota means hiring religiously informed scholars; engaging students in study of the various religious and moral visions for society through new curricular initiatives; and bringing together representatives of major secular and religious perspectives in public debate.

An intellectually invigorating campus climate in which religious and secular perspectives compete would, in turn, generate heightened interest in what it means to be a moral person. By way of example, I have tried to show that Christian thought possesses abundant intellectual and theological resources for fostering a healthy campus intellectual climate and the restoration of moral education.

The policy prospects for such a vision are largely tied to the readiness and willingness of the faculty to open the intellectual doors of the university to more than the two perspectives that currently shape the academic agenda: scientific naturalism and postmodernism. Faculty members would need to see that there are no constitutional problems with this policy, that faculty positions would be secure regardless of religious or nonreligious views, and that the reputation of the university as a whole and, consequently, their individual status would be enhanced. A large obstacle is the faculty's negative

view of evangelical Christians, which means that such an effort needs to engage academics from a wide cross section of religious communities. A theocratic takeover of the university is just not in the cards, if only because of the reality of pluralism.

The citizens of Minnesota can promote openness to religious perspectives in the academic life of their preeminent state university by voicing their expectation that religion gain access to the source of cultural authority—the university—to which secularists have clung tightly for the past century. It's just, and it's academically promising. The time has come to open the academic gates to faith-informed scholarship, which can, by virtue of its appeal to transcendence, launch our university to greatness and rescue students from the academic roach motel.

Notes

1. George Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 67.
2. Alston Chase, "Harvard and the Making of the Unabomber," *Atlantic Monthly*, June 2000.
3. Steven Rosenstone, "The Idea of a University," paper presented to the University of Minnesota Sesquicentennial Symposium on the University's Contribution to Minnesota's Economic, Social, and Cultural Vitality.
4. Stanley Aronowitz, *The Knowledge Factory* (Boston: Beacon), p. 63.
5. See Julie Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 267–69.
6. See the Web site of the Presidents' Campaign for the Advancement of Liberal Learning, sponsored by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, at aacu.org.
7. Comments by Professor John Cogan in a fall 2002 University of Minnesota course on comparative education.
8. Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 442.
9. Quoted in William Willimon and Thomas Naylor, *The Abandoned Generation: Rethinking Higher Education* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 121.
10. For historical perspective on the place of religion at the university, see University of Minnesota, "Report to the President: President's Task Force on Religious Affairs," June 6, 1972.
11. Williamson and Naylor, *Abandoned Generation*, p. 22.
12. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990); and Marsden, *Outrageous Idea*.
13. Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986).
14. For example, nearly 1,500 Christian graduate students recently spent five holiday break days in Atlanta learning from leading Christian scholars how to integrate a Christian perspective with their scholarship. "Following Christ 2002," a conference for graduate students, faculty, and professionals, December 28, 2002–January 2, 2003, sponsored by Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship.
15. L. Bolce and G. DeMaio, "Antipathy toward Christian Fundamentalists," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, no. 1, vol. 63 (1999), p. 55.

16. Williamsburg Charter Survey on Religion and Public Life
17. Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).
18. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
19. Marsden, *Outrageous Idea*, p. 487.
20. Hamburger, *Separation*, p. 483.
21. Jon Roberts and James Turner, *The Sacred and the Secular University* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 33.
22. Marsden, *Outrageous Idea*, p. 431.
23. *Ibid.* Compare Warren Nord, *Religion and American Education* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), pp. 265–69.
24. American Religion Data Archives (www.thearda.com).
25. A corresponding risk is that some Minnesota parents, especially those of Christian background, may perceive the hiring of Hindu or Buddhist scholars, for example, as an explicit effort to proselytize their children. Their fears need to be allayed through a proactive parent and citizen education program.
26. Stanford University, 2002. *Stanford Today Online*. Retrieved July 24, 2002, from the Stanford University Web site (<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/news/stanfordtoday/ed/9703/9703ncf102.shtml>).
27. T. T. Clydesdale, "Toward Understanding the Role of Bible Beliefs and Higher Education in American Attitudes toward Eradicating Poverty, 1964–1996," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1999), pp. 103–18. See also H. W. Perkins, "A Research Note on Religiosity as Opiate or Prophetic Stimulant among Students in England and the United States," *Review of Religious Research*, vol. 26, no. 3 (1985), pp. 269–79.
28. National Association of Scholars, *NAS/Zogby Poll Reveals American Colleges Are Teaching Dubious Ethical Lessons* (Princeton, N.J.: National Association of Scholars, July 2002).
29. See Michael Hamilton and Johanna Yngvason, "Patrons of the Evangelical Mind," *Christianity Today*, July 8, 2002, pp. 42–48.
30. Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 5th ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 75.
31. Marsden, *Outrageous Idea*, p. 431.
32. James Davidson Hunter, *Culture Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), p. 211.
33. Quoted in Nord, *Religion and American Education*, p. 275.
34. On the Intelligent Design Movement, see William Dembski and Michael Behe, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999), and Robert Pennock, *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics: Philosophical, Theological, and Scientific Perspectives* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001). For further discussion of the explanatory capacities of Christian scholarship, see Marsden, *Outrageous Idea*, pp. 83–100. ■