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## To the Editor

ROBERT OSBURN'S PIECE, "IN DIVERSITY'S Holy Name: The Case for Faith-Based Scholarship at the University of Minnesota," should stimulate some discussion at the university. Unfortunately, he is so right in what he asserts that his proposals will have a difficult time gaining a fair hearing there. That is because the majority of the faculty members at Minnesota are committed to a position that religious beliefs are inappropriate for their scholarship and teaching. That is true for faith-holding faculty as well as those who are hostile to faith in God.

But it isn't just the University of Minnesota that is myopic when it comes to the consideration of the religious views of faith-holding faculty. That has been the position in American public (and much private) higher education for the past century. The study of religion in other than its cultural and historical aspects is viewed as unworthy of scholarship and inappropriate for the classroom.

To address this imbalance, some of Osburn's ideas are commendable. For example, his linking of Christian theism to the support of academic freedom is novel and compelling. It is true that the pendulum has swung far since the church and state connived to restrict the voices of dissent. Now the public universities have connived with the state to restrict voices of dissent—the religious ones. This topic would invite some of the good debates in the academy that Mr. Osburn advocates in his piece.

Osburn's idea of placing faculty of diverse religious views into the academic departments is also interesting. Faculty members with religious faith arguing how their faith informs their scholarship would liven up department luncheons. But it would take people of strong convictions

and no little courage to do this in view of the prevailing forces in the academy. In fact, there are now people of faith in many University of Minnesota departments who have been silenced by the academic doctrine that their faith is not appropriate to their work as scholars and teachers. Marxists were never so timid.

How one can engage in faith-based scholarship in the various disciplines is, of course, the tricky problem. Is there Christian physics? Muslim mathematics? Further, how does one use theology to link the disciplines together? These are tasks that require careful thought. It is one thing to have Christian faculty members doing scholarship in the disciplines (we have lots of those). It is quite another thing to have Christianity, or another faith, woven into the fabric of those disciplines. That is the heart of Osburn's challenge: that we should integrate faith and scholarship in a secular setting. It is a worthy, but difficult, challenge to address.

*Harold A. Miller*  
*Vice President for Academic Affairs*  
*Northwestern College*

BOB OSBURN HAS SOUNDED A PROVOCATIVE call to treat a scholar's faith as a relevant consideration in university employment. Although I agree with his diagnosis of contemporary university life, I'm not completely sure about the efficacy of his cure. I'm not confident that public universities ever did a very good job of providing "instruction about wise and ethical living" to their students. That faith-based scholarship can serve as the fuel to reignite a blaze of wisdom and rectitude among young Minnesotans seems doubtful, at least on a large scale. Most students and parents want high-paying jobs as the outcome of their hefty five-figure payouts for higher education. They figure that both moral sensibility and the life of the mind, if not actual impediments to maximizing earning poten-

tial, at least can be safely relegated to some arena outside the classroom.

Now of course they are wrong about this, and Osburn is dead right in questioning the contemporary university's lack of balance in the favoring of nonreligious and nonmoral points of view that encourage this way of thinking. Like it or not, university faculty teach by example, and our current examples often do seem limited to the instrumental and the profane. Students deserve exposure to the viewpoints of Osburn's faith-based professors, whether that exposure leads to an ethical epiphany or a better entry-level salary at the brokerage house. Balance demands it. In 1970, the classicist William Arrowsmith presaged Osburn's concerns. It is now possible, he wrote,

"[F]or a student to go from kindergarten to graduate school without ever encountering a man—a man who might give him the only profound motivation for learning, the hope of becoming a better man."

This is what Bob Osburn is proposing: the hiring of scholars who live by example, and who can serve as examples to young university students. I'm not sure whether hiring these faith-based professors will slow down the inexorable march toward vocationalism and secularism that have become the twin purposes of the university. But it would be good to see more impassioned and compassionate scholars settle into the offices at the University of Minnesota. These scholars would widen the intellectual conversation, and widening the conversation is—in principle—the point of higher education. Frankly, if this were the only benefit, then it would still be benefit enough.

**Dick Nunneley**  
**Professor**

**Education Policy Administration**  
**University of Minnesota—Twin Cities**

UNIVERSITIES WERE CHRISTIAN INVENTIONS, established and pursued by no other civilization or culture. It is a curious thing that it is now commonly thought that Christianity is antithetical to higher learning and to scientific investigation. Robert Osburn is quite right to argue for room in the university community for scholars whose faith might inform their professional work. While I am sympathetic to his project, I nevertheless wonder if his proposal really addresses the problem.

The study of theology was relegated to the margins of many European universities in the nineteenth century in order to avoid sectarian conflicts. It was further diminished, if not banished, in American universities about a century ago when they became captivated with the idea that all academic disciplines ought, as far as possible, to follow the methodology of the natural sciences. Those disciplines that could not do so—philosophy and literary criticism, for example—were permitted to remain in the curriculum as long as they did not make claims to discover or teach what was true. Christian theology, rooted as it is in the revelation of a living God, had little place in such a scholarly community.

This academic ideology is toxic. While it may be congenial to the natural sciences, it undermines the conviction that we can come to know the truth in other ways. It reduces the human person to physiology and it denies the spiritual. It inevitably leads to relativism in ethics and aesthetics, and at the beginning of the new millennium it has led us to doubt profoundly that we can know the truth about anything, even in the natural sciences.

It seems to me that Mr. Osburn is right to think that theology has a place at the University of Minnesota and other public institutions, but not if it has to concede the rules of the game to the secularists. That is to say, theology cannot merely be study

about religion; it must be the study of revelation, taken seriously and on its own terms. If this can be permitted (and on the assumption that no one is forced to study it, what is there to be feared?), then perhaps “faith-informed” scholarship—which is open to other ways of knowing the truth and not blinkered by a limited methodology—can also have a place. Toward that end, I wish Mr. Osburn every success in the project he proposes.

**Robert G Kennedy**  
Professor  
Department of Catholic Studies  
University of St Thomas

ROBERT OSBURN IMPLIES THAT THE MODERN secular university discriminates against religious ideas. He specifically alleges, for example, that scientists (though not necessarily at the University of Minnesota) have stifled inquiry undertaken by intelligent design theorists. I am not familiar enough with the debate to know if mainstream evolutionary theorists have rejected intelligent design on non-scientific grounds, rather than on the merits. But even assuming that Osburn is right, that still can't justify a program of affirmative action for religious scholars. Surely we have learned by now that you don't fight discrimination by engaging in reverse discrimination.

Osburn is right that religious ideas are scarce on campus. But I think he has overlooked an obvious explanation that has nothing to do with discrimination. The University of Minnesota is (quite properly in my view) committed to scientific method. To oversimplify vastly, ideas are accepted or rejected based on evidence and logic or reason. Therefore, they don't even make it to the starting gate unless they are “falsifiable” (to use Karl Popper's term) or refutable or testable. That is, ideas (say, scientific theories) don't count in the acade-

my unless they can potentially be refuted by some event or observation. None of this means that an unfalsifiable theory isn't true; just that it cannot be handled by scientific methods.

But, unless I'm mistaken, most religious ideas cannot be stated in terms that are refutable. Ideas that spring from, or reflect, moral universals, absolutes, faith, or transcendence (all terms invoked by Osburn) are not readily cast in the form of scientific hypotheses. They can't be judged at the tribunal of reason. Not surprisingly, then, they are conspicuous by their absence on campus.

It is possible that I'm wrong, and the gulf between science and religion is not as wide as I imagine. But then the solution is obvious. If Osburn is correct that our current “explanatory systems, shaped by secular worldviews, are full of gaps, especially concerning human behavior,” then that failure presents opportunities for “faith-informed” scholars to demonstrate how religiously inspired scholarship can help fill those gaps. Naturally, their theories will have to withstand the same rigorous review that secular theories are subjected to. That's how religious ideas can become part of the canon—by earning their place rather than asking to be imposed on the university by decree.

**Ian Maitland**  
Professor  
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WE HAVE BEEN HEARING A LOT, THESE LAST few weeks, about the crucial importance of “diversity” to a healthy university—and, in turn, to society as it is shaped by universities.

The premise of most of this discussion is that skin color is the most significant evidence of a distinctive viewpoint, whether it be in scientific research or in classroom discussions.

Diversity is indeed a fine thing, and adds much to the flavor of life as well as to the possibility of new discoveries and new insights in every area of intellectual inquiry. If that is what we are seeking, though, it would seem to make more sense to be concerned about seeking students and faculty who bring different intellectual perspectives than different physical appearances. Some twenty years ago the Connecticut Mutual Life Insurance Company commissioned a nationwide study of the attitudes of Americans about a wide range of issues. The researchers found that the race of the respondents had almost no predictive power, while participation in religious congregations was strongly correlated with attitudes that had no obvious connection with religion.

In other words, if universities want a diversity of viewpoints, they should use religious participation as a factor in admissions and in appointments, and they should make the campus friendly to the expression of views based upon religious as well as secular approaches to every field of inquiry.

Robert Osburn's article in the winter issue of *American Experiment Quarterly* makes a number of valuable suggestions about how this could be accomplished.

**Charles Glenn**  
**Professor**  
**Educational Policy**  
**Boston University**

AS CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF THE MACLAURIN Institute, I can't really offer a disinterested commentary on Bob Osburn's analysis. Bob and others have convinced me, as a public health researcher, that worldviews save lives and worldviews take lives. In his book *Modern Fascism*, G. E. Veith reminds us that the horrors of Nazi Germany had three philosophical underpinnings: there is

no transcendent truth, moral statements are just expressions of power, and individual worth is based on group membership. Veith notes that these ideas are alive and well in the postmodern worldview that is being promulgated in today's universities.

I'm a proponent of informed consumer choice, be it health plans, occupations, or worldviews. What if our public health students were offered an explicit choice of worldviews? What if they were able to predict the types of public health interventions that proponents of philosophical naturalism versus theism might propose? What if they were able to compare the actual public health programs that have been implemented by post-modernists versus theists? Couldn't we trust them to make an informed choice among the competing worldviews that will shape their careers and contributions?

Some faculty might object to a requirement that students understand the basic assumptions of a theistic worldview. I, on the other hand, am not overly enthusiastic about faculty who assert with absolute moral authority that there are no moral absolutes, or who believe that the statement "there is no such thing as transcendent truth" is transcendentally true, or whose apparent purpose in life is to convince students that life has no purpose, or who cling to the hope that axiomatic reasoning is a reliable guide to all of truth after it was proven conclusively to be deficient in 1931, or who subscribe to philosophical worldviews that cannot withstand their own critique.

On a good day, I share Bob's clear vision for renewed interest in moral education and development of a generation of leaders at the University of Minnesota who do not shy away from questions of good and evil. On a bad day, I'd settle simply for

a university whose implicitly sanctioned (and sacrosanct) worldviews are not the laughingstock of the next generation.

**Bryan Dowd**  
**Professor**

**Health Services Research & Policy**  
**University of Minnesota-Twin Cities**

I APPRECIATE BOB OSBURN'S CALL FOR diversity at the University of Minnesota in terms of including Christian-based scholarship. Mr. Osburn points out that public universities are diverse in name only. Many in academia view the religious perspective as irrelevant at best, and a threat at worst. This was demonstrated by the comments of a prominent naturalist philosopher who bemoaned that a quarter to a third of academic philosophy professors are Christian. (Others suggest the number is between 10 to 20 percent.)

The foundational role that faith once played in higher education is epitomized by the early mottos of Harvard University: "For the Glory of Christ" and "For Christ and the Church." To be sure, Harvard was never a public institution, but as one of America's elite universities, its early mottos point out the role faith once played in higher education.

The key point I took away from Mr. Osburn's article, and the one that will in all likelihood lead to a "rediscovery" of faith-based scholarship, is the growing ethical and moral barrenness at our public universities. Since ethics and morality must be grounded in something more substantial than mere opinion, this present

academic state of affairs simply can't endure indefinitely. In the United States, morality and ethics have traditionally found their moorings in the Judeo-Christian tradition—specifically Christianity. As Governor Morris, the writer and signer of the U.S. Constitution, observed, "Religion is the only solid basis of good morals: therefore education should teach the precepts of religion and the duties of man towards God."

Mr. Osburn points out that the nearly exclusive focus of education at the University of Minnesota has been "practical, vocationally oriented education." In other words, learning the skills to get a job and earn a living. That certainly should be an important outcome of a university education. Yet making it the overriding focus neglects moral education, which in itself is an indispensable component of our prosperous, free-market economic system. The business scandals that have plagued our nation recently offer a stark reminder of what happens when ethics are abandoned for the bottom line.

Mr. Osburn's proposal to welcome back faith-based scholarship is a small but important step for the University of Minnesota to take in returning to the true mission of education—educating the whole person.

**Tom Prichard**  
**President**  
**Minnesota Family Council ■**