

evidence for evolution. The religious perspectives that George Marsden defends should not be altogether excluded from the academy, but the margins may be exactly where they belong.

Restoring Faith in Higher Education

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In his monumental *The Soul of the American University*, George Marsden has described the secularization of colleges and universities. In response to the spread of liberal, voluntaristic Protestantism, the demand for a more practical and scientific curriculum, and the professionalization of the faculty, educational reformers of the nineteenth century abandoned the clerically controlled classical curriculum and ended mandatory attendance at chapel. Marsden argues that the reformers, who distinguished between the sectarian and the religious, never intended to weaken the Christian character of higher education. But over the course of the twentieth century religion was pushed to the periphery in institutions of higher learning. Relegated at first to the humanities and the arts at a time when science was where the action (and increasingly the money) was and at a time when social scientists were laying claim to the “scientific method,” religion was eventually ghettoized in schools of theology. Even in extracurricular activities, religion gave way to fraternities and sororities in organizing social life. With the exception of expensive chapels, “monuments to a disappearing Christian ideal,” Marsden concludes that religion has for some time been less visible, and easily avoided, on most campuses.

In the “Concluding Unscientific Postscript” of his book, and in the essay published here, Marsden argues for a return to mainstream academia of “the ancient and distinguished enterprise of relating faith to learning.” Acknowledging that many professors in the late twentieth century are “personally” religious, he believes, with Stephen Carter, that privatizing religion trivializes it, thereby impoverishing public discourse. Of course, Marsden is not suggesting that religious forces have the power they once had to drive all challengers, from Charles Darwin to Oscar Wilde, out of classrooms and colleges, and dominate discourse in every discipline. He would be quite content, surely, if a religious perspective were one “among other points of view” in institutions of higher learning.

On practical and theoretical grounds, it seems to me, a strong case can be made for opening up academic inquiry to religious perspectives. If public discourse, inside and outside our universities, cannot accurately be described as “naked,” neither is it so rich in insight as to be able to discourage faith-based

points of view, so full of ethical imperatives. It is ironic, but utterly appropriate, to enlist in this effort the pluralism that played such a key role, at religion's expense, in establishing the university as a free marketplace of ideas. A consistent commitment to pluralism, which has already made room for feminism, Marxism, and Afrocentrism, does suggest allowing religion under the tent protected by academic freedom.

Despite the visible and admittedly influential Christian Right, the danger in our vital and heterogeneous American universities of a dominant religious belief exercising a chilling effect on free inquiry or free expression is considerably less than it was a century or two ago. The instinct to let sleeping dogmatism lie is understandable, but can it be defended, given the many dogmatism now running free in private and public institutions across the nation?

If religious perspectives have a right to an open admissions policy, why haven't religious faculty members introduced them into syllabi, lectures, and research? In many important ways, I would argue, they have. My university, not known as a bastion of orthodoxy, has a religious studies program, with an undergraduate major and a healthy roster of courses, including *The Earlier Middle Ages*, *Introduction to the Bible*, and *Readings in the New Testament*. The faculty members who teach these courses have appointments, respectively, in the history, Near Eastern studies, and English departments, and each of them is deeply religious. Their faith is evident as well in their scholarly publications. Our government department offers *Legal Reasoning and Legal Adaptation: A Comparison of American and Talmudic Law*, taught by an orthodox Jew (with the assistance of a Lubavitcher rabbi); *Economics of Participation and Workers' Management*, taught by a committed Catholic; and *Religion, Ethics, and the Environment*, in *Natural Resources*, taught by an outspoken evangelical Protestant. In addition, an array of courses, from *Medieval Philosophy* to *Early American Literature* to *Chinese Buddhism*, take religion so much on its own terms that it is not clear and may not matter whether the professor is personally pious. Self-censorship, as George Marsden describes it, probably does inhibit some professors, and in some parts of mainstream academic culture reflecting on the implications of one's faith may well be considered unprofessional, or in bad taste, but religion is by no means unrepresented in the curriculum, nor is it without advocates in the faculty, outside of schools of theology.

Where religion is absent, it may be that it is in the marketplace, but no one is buying. Pluralism should remove barriers to religion in the academy, but it should not guarantee religion a place. And reconciling what Marsden has elsewhere called the "methodological secularism" characteristic of academic teaching and research, with the insights rooted in a faith, which for many precedes and is superior to "rational understanding" is, as he knows, a "complex business." This is perhaps easiest to demonstrate in the physical sciences and engineering. After all, as Marsden wrote in an essay in *The Secularization of the Academy*, no one

wants a “pious mechanic” to behave as if there is a “devil in the carburetor.” And in this essay he concedes that “with many scientific and other technical issues, belief in a creator will not perceptively change one’s work.”

When Marsden concludes that “legitimate restraints” should be placed on religious expression in institutions of higher learning, he seems to move ever closer to the status quo. Although he points out, quite correctly, that all academics bring to their work *a priori* assumptions not amenable to empirical evaluation, Marsden is willing to exclude anyone not “willing to abide by standards of evidence and argument that can be assessed by their academic colleagues. That means, as in a court of law, arguments cannot be settled by claims of special revelation.” Throughout this essay, Marsden is more successful in identifying areas inappropriate for religion than in articulating how religious perspectives might enter into research and teaching. Theists and non-theists, he writes, “can” (does he not mean “must”?) describe photosynthesis in the same ways. They may reach similar conclusions, he agrees, about the causes of the American Civil War or about the impact of free trade on American workers. This view implies, it seems to me, that for the same reason we do not and should not have feminist organic chemistry or Afrocentric econometrics, we should not want Methodist or Muslim mathematics.

For these reasons, it is essential for advocates of religious perspectives in the academy to explain what they mean when they insist that “in every academic discipline there are wider contexts where belief in a creator may make a major difference.” After all, leaving the question of theism open will not, many “pragmatists” assert, have any impact at all on scholarly work. Marsden makes an important contribution in this area by reminding us that religion can and does shape the questions professors ask and the hypotheses with which they begin. Thus, while a perspective rooted in faith does not give “creationists” a right to force an either/or choice between atheistic evolution and the account in Genesis, it can result in a scientifically sound identification of weaknesses in current theories of biological evolution. Ideally, and Thomas Kuhn notwithstanding, it is usually the quality of the work, rather than what motivates it, that counts, especially in the sciences where, ironically, Marsden may underestimate how influential a point of view originating in religion already is; but also in the humanities, where nontheists as well as theists investigate religious themes in Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, some more insightfully than others.

Those who believe that humans are not the creators of the only “reality” we can know, then, are not silenced by or silent in the academy, even in the sciences. They are not barred, nor should they be, from asking academic questions, even when they are shaped by special revelations. We must distinguish, it seems to me, between beliefs professors bring to their academic work “that can be neither proven nor disproven by empirical or rational standards” and the work itself, which must be subject to testing and review according to standards in the discipline. In a pluralistic intellectual enterprise and a heteroge-

neous university, religious professors in their research and teaching must go beyond the evidence generated by faith (much as anti-abortion advocates must do in the political arena) if they wish to persuade those who do not already share their beliefs. The only legitimate discourse in the academy is discourse amenable to interrogation, a requirement that poses a challenge to perspectives rooted in faith but one that can be, and has been, overcome. With these caveats, if George Marsden is calling on colleges, universities, and faculty to do no less but no more than give religion a free field and no favors, I, for one, wish him Godspeed.

Religion: On a Remote and Higher Plane

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George Marsden is a distinguished scholar of American religious thought and his *Soul of the American University* is an indispensable addition to the history of American higher education. In that book and in the present essay he raises important questions concerning the role of religion in American intellectual life. Yet, while agreeing with his argument that religious viewpoints should have full access to academia, I have a number of reservations as to how he here poses the issue.

Professor Marsden is surely right in his general point: In much of the academy, religion is regarded as something of an intellectual embarrassment. Whether they say so explicitly or not, the majority of academics conduct their work as if the "God Question" had been definitively answered in the negative. When religion is not ignored, it is kept at a safe distance, spoken of only in historical, clinical, positivist, or reductionist ways. It is also the case that at least some religious academics indulge in self-censorship because they have been socialized into regarding the intrusion of religious views into scholarly discourse as inappropriate behavior. That is particularly unfortunate since, as Marsden indicates, the introduction of such views, especially those of an orthodox variety, might help counter the radical philosophical relativism that pervades the postmodernist university.

Still, Marsden's putting of the question seems to me not quite right. Religious perspectives are excluded from the academy not—or at least not primarily—because of positivist biases or fears of religious establishments, religious wars, or religious dogmatism. In fact, they are not really *excluded* at all. Even in an era of speech codes and political correctness, most academics remain Vol-