

Culture needs faith-and-reason-based law schools

What is a Christian university? Some people would marginalize it as a “faith-based” institution. But this does not accurately name what Christian universities have to offer.

These universities should be identified more truly. In fact, they are “faith and reason”-based institutions. This is because their institutional rationale for existence is to provide a setting that offers a mediating, ecumenical role between the universal and the particular. They mediate between human reason, which has universal range, and a particular life-choice perspective of faith and love.

Both these approaches, the universal and the particular, when joined together, make a truly humane contribution to a common ground for global culture. Institutional requirements that faith-and-reason-based teachers and students voluntarily profess fidelity to a particular Christian tradition of faith-and-reason are therefore nothing sinister when understood in this light. Rightly understood, these requirements act as a guarantee that scholars and students in such schools are honestly committed to their mediating, ecumenical role in the global theatre.

This is because Christian universities self-consciously adopt an institutional rationale that they must be able to speak fluently both kinds of “languages”: those of faith and those of reason. Through their whole-hearted commitment to both faith and reason, they refuse to “short change” one at the expense of the other. Such an exquisite balance of particular faith and universal reason, as



Global Theatre
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historically developed originally in medieval Catholic universities, is a rich cultural heritage and a great resource for global culture.

Many commentators have noted a culture-leveling hegemony brought on by two recent causes: unbridled Western scientism and economic globalization. This dual tidal wave threatens to drown global culture, as the latest version of the West assumes that it knows best. But Christian universities are an excellent resource for resisting such a disaster. By their nature, they offer a unique model for safeguarding the wise voices of human tradition within modern global culture.

Nevertheless, many people argue that any adherence to a particular faith must contradict the Christian university’s purported intellectual aim and its mediating, ecumenical goal. However, it has been the historical experience of the Catholic tradition that protection for particular faith commitments is precisely what is necessary in order to protect reason from falling into a grand intellectual mistake: the mistake of subtly promoting a universal hegemony of only one implicit ideology, an ideology that remains dimly-understood, yet all-pervasive.

The Christian university, by explicitly highlighting an institutional “bias” in the form of its “faith” commitment, intends that this “faith” commitment is consequently never taken for granted. Rather, it intends

that it always be put forth as a perspective to be vigorously challenged and renewed through rational inquiry.

In other words, the strength of the faith-and-reason-based university tradition is that its very constitution is designed to highlight self-critical, autonomous inquiry. The danger of a secular institution, however, which by its very nature is committed to “the official ideology of having no official ideology”, is that it is tempted to treat the problems of interdisciplinarity and contextuality as having already been solved once and for all by its secular ideology: the “official ideology of no ideology”.

But no one lives by universal reason alone. Everyone builds a home by choosing particular loves. The faith-and-reason-based university tradition, therefore, by its very nature does not see this profound human problem of the tension between universal reason and particular life-choice perspectives as ever being solvable by an easy ideological or institutional declaration of official neutrality.

A dynamic, changing life must be both particularly autonomous and yet universally self-critical in order to move forward freely and flourish.

Thus, the bias of “officially having no bias” is arguably the most dangerous of all intellectual delusions. An official secular bias is an invitation to intellectual complacency. It officially considers the perennial educational problems of self-examination and dialogue with other perspectives to have been “officially” solved.

But any particular faith,

as expressed in any particular life-choice, always needs to be purified and challenged by universal reason. Christian universities think this kind of self-examination is best done when a particular faith is allowed to flourish autonomously in the unique free space institutionally created for continual rational scrutiny and self-examination: the Christian university.

While the classic faith-and-reason-based model of the university need not be adopted by all universities, surely it is a worthy experiment for Christian faith-and-reason communities desiring it. Such communities wish to be free to explore and renew their own faith-and-reason tradition by the autonomous

means of their own native intellectual energies.

Otherwise the only alternative for such communities is to face the threat of ideological hegemony from the secularized institutional models for the university that impose an “official ideology of no religious ideology”.

Yet far too often do people of faith in the modern university sense that both their academic freedom and their religious freedom is being denied. They sense this because of inherent institutional structures that consistently and prejudicially subordinate all particular faiths to one particular, institutional form of ideological rationalization: the “official ideology of no ideology”.

Students trained in a Christian university can therefore make a very valuable contribution to society. As a self-critical minority, they are extremely well trained in sensitivity and respect for particular viewpoints. They have learned for themselves the real human value of individual and corporate autonomy. They are thus especially well suited to defending these ideals as a common ground for global culture.

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