

Bigotry Perhaps, Faithfulness For Sure

Contact

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by Nick Lantinga, Executive Secretary

While visiting Korea in December, I found both great interest and growth in integral Christian higher education. At several Christian colleges I met with many faculty members greatly committed to working out the Christian faith within their discipline. Organizations such as Disciples with an Evangelical Worldview, the Institute for Calvinistic Studies in Korea, and the Korean Christian Studies Institute, provide excellent resources for this growing interest.

Yet, soon after returning to North America I came across some rather abrasive comments. In an interview about his new book, the public intellectual Christopher Hitchens vented his “hatred and contempt for religion.” Religion, Hitchens continues, produces not only physical poverty but also a “poverty of the mind and the imagination.” A new book out by Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, adopts a similar approach by linking terror with religion. Religious beliefs are “simply beyond the scope of rational discourse” and need to be overcome if a lasting peace will be achieved.

Just before I left for India *The Chronicle of Higher Education* published a column lamenting the resurgence of religiously informed higher education. In it Stanley Fish, former Dean of Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois Chicago, longs for the days when a serious understanding of religion was quarantined “in the safe houses of the church, the synagogue, and the mosque.”

I know that the Lord reigns. I know that elite opinion, especially in the West, is often directed by a faith and hope in the “pure reason” of autonomous individuals. I also know that anti-religious bigotry often accompanies this faith and hope in autonomous reason. Even so, such comments irritated me more than a little. My attitude stems in part from the intellectual’s willingness to dictate the norms of academic life even though they operate from such a small world view.

Perhaps Hitchens and Harris could contrast the horrible poverty of both mind and body inflicted by the anti-religious ideologies of the last century with the current work of Christians in civil society. He might attend our conference in Moscow and hear of various Christian efforts to spark new businesses, hospitals and schools throughout the world.

Perhaps Fish could listen to Peter Gomes, Harvard University's longest serving Plummer professor of Christian Morals: "[Harvard] may not look that way, but it was founded by us, for us, and we have kept it going, even in its most secular and pluralistic environment." Or Fish could revisit the story of Jonathan Edwards, Princeton's first President, masterfully recounted in George Marsden's recent award-winning book. There he would find that Christian conviction yielded most of the very institutions and practices he scorns.

Perhaps these intellectuals will reflect on recent scholarship on 700+ religious colleges and universities in the United States. In *God on the Quad* Ethics and Public Policy research associate Naomi Schaefer Riley shows that religious higher education is thriving. Riley's work confirms many of the findings of Alan Wolfe's research that describes the relatively vigorous academic environment at Christian liberal arts colleges. Students apparently find the pursuit of meaning and truth more attractive than the post-modern inquisitions that have so consumed much of higher education.

Ultimately it doesn't matter if academic elites recognize the importance of explicitly and clearly Christian teaching and research. Christians all over the world, across race, class, gender – even denominational – boundaries are supporting and encouraging a holistic approach to all aspects of academic life. We are convinced that the best fruits of reason grow from the soil of orthodox Christian faith. This soil is what C.S. Lewis called "mere Christianity," provides the basis for a community of trust, whose members can challenge and correct each other as they develop scholarship while in contact with the world's various cultures.

IAPCHE continues to support this growth with every resource at our disposal. At our recent regional conference in Chennai, India we launched the CASC Program and recommended several more initiatives. We continue our ambitious schedule of regional conferences (see pages 4-5). We are also working toward a major

international conference later next year that we hope will be held in Latin America.

There is much to be done. Perhaps some open minded intellectuals will take note. Perhaps the more arrogant and close-minded of them will not. But in the meantime let us not be disheartened by their disapproval and scorn. For the Lord is with us, let us not be afraid.