

VERITAS

Truth Matters

*The following address was given by Dr. Everett Piper
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This story is about a young man who has been out on the road for a long time. He has spent many days freely traveling to the places of his wildest dreams. He has spent many nights pursuing his own way and doing what he wanted and what his heart desired. He now spends many private moments wishing he could just go home. Listen with me, if you will to this man's story:

There was once a man who had a son. Even though this son was very well cared for and had many blessings that the neighbors did not have, there came a day when the son came to his father and said: "Father, I want right now what is coming to me. I want my freedom. I want my money. I want my own way."

So, the father relented. He gave his son the freedom he demanded. He let his son decide how to use (or abuse) his own inheritance. He permitted his son to leave home and have his own way. So the son packed his bags and left for a distant country. There, undisciplined and dissipated, the son squandered everything he had. He had his freedom. He had his money. And, he wasted it all by living his own way.

Not long after squandering his birthright, there was a bad famine in the land and the son began to hurt. Having nothing left but his "own way" and perhaps not even that any longer, this young man began working in the fields to slop pigs, thinking he must do so just to survive. He was so hungry he was now eating the corncoobs in the pig slop.

Well, this brought him to his senses and one day he said, "All those farmhands back home working for my father are much better off than me. They at least sit down to three meals a day and here I am starving to death. I am going back home (Loosely taken from The Message, pp. 1890 -1891).

I want to talk about "going back home." I want to talk about colleges and universities here in the United States, about what we might call our educational home in the American Academy. I want to talk about the birth of this Academy; about how far we have strayed from our Christian birthright in twenty-first-century America, and about how to return home. I want to talk about homecoming.

The American Academy was born in the mid-seventeenth century; and from that time until the Civil War, colleges and universities in the United States shared a strong relationship with the Church. Almost all colleges were dominated by a Christian worldview. Clergymen were the leading representatives of the intellectual class and the denominations, which they represented,

took the lead in founding colleges and instructing students (Ringenberg, 1984, p.37). The goal of American higher education during its first two hundred years was to propagate knowledge and to prepare upright leadership within a Christian society (Hunter, 1987, p.166). The mission of the academy during this time was the advancement of civic duty, moral development, and Christian responsibility. Colleges and universities existed to “confirm the existence of God and his relationship with the world and mankind” (Ibid).

During this foundational time for the academy, regardless of the vocation for which the student was preparing, the colonial college sought to provide the student an education that was distinctly Christian. Examples of this intent are seen in the early mission statements of schools such as Harvard and Yale. Harvard’s mission statement admonished, “Let every student consider well the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life and therefore, to lay Christ at the bottom, as the only foundation for all sound knowledge and learning” (Ringenberg, 1984, p. 38). Similarly, Yale’s goal for its students was “to know God in Jesus Christ and . . . to lead a Godly, sober life” (Ibid).

These Ivy League colleges were founded with the mission of promoting and maintaining a Christian moral order. They had the purpose of galvanizing the commitment of future leaders. They had the potential to equip students to handle the challenges of defending their faith from error and extending the influence of Christianity throughout their world. They gave birth to an American Academy, an educational home, which was distinctly Christian.

Nevertheless, since the Civil War, the American Academy has been wandering further and further away from this Christian home. We have decided we want to wrench our birthright out of the hands of our Father and control our inheritance ourselves. As a result, here are some examples of how far the American Academy has traveled down the prodigal path and, thus, strayed from home.

The Path of “Derecognition”

In the late 1990s, a female student joined the Tufts Christian Fellowship (TCF), an InterVarsity organization at Tufts University. Although this student was struggling with her sexual identity, when she joined the TCF, she claimed to be a believer who respected the Bible as the true, authoritative word of God; and she sought to live her life accordingly.

By her junior year, however, her Tufts education convinced her that the Bible was relative and that she had the right to marry as a lesbian. At this same time, she also wanted to pursue an official leadership position with the Tufts Christian Fellowship.

After careful consideration, the TCF denied her application for leadership. They did not deny her the right to attend their meetings. They did not ostracize her as a person but merely indicated that because of her behavioral choices and corresponding lesbian lifestyle that she should not be a leader of this evangelical group.

As the result of this stance, the TCF leaders were promptly accused of being bigots, and a formal complaint was filed with the administration at Tufts. The Tufts Community Union Judiciary was, thereby, called to order late one night – actually after midnight so that the TCF could not be present to defend itself – and voted to “derecognize” TCF.

To be “derecognized” meant that TCF lost its funding, could no longer reserve rooms on campus, could no longer advertise on campus, could no longer participate in the annual Student Activities Fair, effectively banning TCF from campus.

A key Tufts administrator summarized the derecognition in this way: “Basically, as far as Tufts is concerned, you don’t exist.” (French, 2002, p 87-96).

In the same year, Christian Fellowship groups at Middlebury College in Vermont, Williams College in Massachusetts, Ball State University in Indiana, Whitman College in Washington, and Grinnell College in Iowa faced discrimination complaints, administrative sanctions, and even outright bans for holding to a similar Christian worldview under similar circumstances (Ibid). They, too, were “derecognized”. In other words, their values and ideas were deemed unworthy of formal recognition, open discussion and public debate. Their right to freedom of expression was impeded. Their right to even exist as a group of Christians holding an historical and orthodox perspective of sexual morality was threatened and in some cases curtailed.

The Path of Freshmen “Reorientation”

Not only is the modern prodigality of the American Academy evidenced in attacks on Christian Fellowships, but also in the modern versions of freshmen orientation.

At many universities today, freshmen orientation is no longer simply a time to become acquainted with friends, learn about college life, and receive instruction on how to succeed in class. At Columbia University, for example, orientation is designed to give students the chance to “reevaluate and . . . rid themselves of their own social and personal beliefs that foster inequality” (French, 2002, p. 107).

In other words, students are given a chance to “rid themselves” of their evangelical Christian worldview. They are encouraged to set aside their “personal belief” in the truth of Jesus and that he is the only way to salvation because that belief might smack of “inequality.”

They are encouraged to be “tolerant” of all worldviews except those that the faculty and administration of this particular institution deem intolerable – a double standard that is surprisingly void of recognition!

The Path of “Tolerance”

In addition to attacks on Christian Fellowships and re-orientation of freshmen, Christians in the academy have had to deal with other forms of persecution.

Recently, at the University of Pennsylvania, Cornell University, and Dartmouth, for instance, campus activists stole and burned conservative student newspapers without facing any significant penalty from administrators.

At Purdue, Castleton, and Syracuse University, Christian campus organizations that use the Bible as the guide for decision making find they simply cannot operate without violating expansive nondiscrimination policies. They have found their existence imperiled when administrators began requiring all student organizations to draft constitutions that pledge not to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation (Ibid).

A Catholic resident assistant at a Big Ten university was recently confronted with this anti-Christian bias when he refused to wear the pink triangle button (signifying support for the gay agenda) that was given out during orientation, and was fired by the Dean of Students of that institution by the end of the day.

Again, apparently all lifestyles and worldviews are acceptable except those of orthodox Catholics and evangelicals who believe in biblical standards for sexual fidelity and the traditional morality represented in scripture.

The Path of Academic Relativism

One final shocking sign of how far the American Academy has strayed from its Christian home can be found in the 2002 University of Michigan Course Catalogue. Incredibly, the course description for a class entitled “Ethics of Corporate Management” contains these assertions: “This course is not concerned with the personal moral issues of honesty and truthfulness. It is assumed that the students at this university have already formed their own standards on these issues.” (World Magazine, September 2002, p. 14)

The relativism clearly evident in this course description highlights dramatically how far we have come from Harvard’s assertion that truth is absolute and that Christ is “the only foundation for all sound knowledge and learning.”

The Path of Christian Colleges and Universities

Unfortunately, it is not only that part of the American Academy that we think of as “public” or “secular” which has strayed from home: even contemporary “Christian” colleges and universities are playing the prodigal.

Recently, at a Christian college in the North, the word “evangelical” was intentionally removed by the Provost from the job postings because he “wanted to attract a broader base” to the faculty.

At this same institution, a faculty member confronted a student who didn’t know the answer to a question in class by saying, “Jesus Christ, don’t you know the answer to the question.” Unbelievably, the same Provost defended this faculty member by saying, “Some members of this denomination don’t consider this to be cursing.”

At another Christian college just last year, a top administrator was asked if he would place a chapel photo of students praying at the altar labeled “Jesus Christ as the Perspective” on the cover of the institution’s alumni magazine. The administrator answered, “No, it would make too many people nervous.”

At this same college a candidate for a senior administrative position went through an entire interview process for this top level job and noticed that he had never been asked any questions about his personal Christian testimony. When, at the end of the interview, he asked why no one had ever inquired about his faith he was told, “We can’t ask that here. The State won’t permit it.”

Another scenario involves a Midwest Christian college where the faculty, staff, administration and Board members were asked to identify the values and doctrine that distinguish a college as

being truly evangelical. One Board member commented on the issues of traditional sexual standards by saying, “I have searched forever and cannot find any psychological proof that sexual relationships outside of marriage are harmful . . . I don’t think it is a non-issue but I don’t know if it’s an issue we need to have a formal position on”.

At this same school a faculty member commented on the doctrine of the virgin birth and the historicity of Christ’s miracles by saying, “I don’t think it is necessary to take a position on the virgin birth” and that the miracles of Jesus as recorded in scripture could be “message statements” and not “reality statements”.

In the past few months, I received from yet another Christian college a forty-three-page, four-color publication in which the institution never once mentioned the name of Jesus. The best this college could do in these forty-three pages was to talk about education for “ethics, leadership, values, and integrity.”

Either they forgot to talk about Jesus, or they intentionally omitted our Lord’s name. Whichever the case, whatever the path they have taken (whether of forgetfulness or intentionality), this Christian college has also strayed far from home.

Finally, in a marketing campaign currently underway for a Christian university right here in Oklahoma, the ad says nothing about God or even spiritual growth. Instead the tag line refers to “self-actualization” as the optimal outcome of going to that Christian school.

Summary: The Prodigal Path

In the story of the Prodigal Son (as we heard a few minutes ago), Jesus declares, “Not long after squandering his birthright, there was a bad famine in the land and the son began to hurt. Having nothing left but his ‘own way’ and perhaps not even that any longer, this young man began working in the fields to slop pigs, thinking he must do so just to survive. He was so hungry he was now eating the corncobs in the pig slop.”

Today as I look around and see our neighborhoods, our nation, and our world, I believe that having nothing left but our “own way” in the contemporary Academy is akin to “working in the fields to slop pigs.”

We are so starved and hungry for something meaningful, something workable, something fulfilling that we are trying anything, even the “corncobs” of academic relativism, reorientation, derecognition, and false “tolerance.”

And, yes, many Christian colleges and universities seem to be willing to walk in the “pig slop” and eat the “corncobs” of our broken and dysfunctional post-modern/post-Christian culture.

In an attempt to be “relevant” many in the Christian Academy have become nothing more than pale and mediocre copies of their secular counterparts. They, therefore, are heard as an inconsequential hum rather than a bold voice for ideas that are proven by history and sanctified by God.

It is time for us to leave the corncobs and pig slop behind and come home.

It is time to come home to a university grounded in the Body of Christ—in Family—where a community of learners strives to love the Lord God with their whole heart, soul, mind, and strength and where fellow students understand the priority of community which is implicit in the great commandment to love your neighbor as yourself.

It is time to come home to a university that is committed to the classical view of the liberal arts, committed to the pursuit of all truth as God’s truth – A university where broader learning and deeper intellectual inquiry is critical to understanding our Creator, His creatures, and His creation.

It is time to come home to a place where Jesus is the lens and Lord of all we see and all we do. A place where we are not afraid to acknowledge that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life and that no one comes to the Father but by Him.

It is time to come home to a place that takes seriously God’s call to know the truth. A place that admits that truth actually exists and that the pursuit of truth actually sets us free to engage in the market place of ideas without bias and the corresponding shallowness of what is politically correct.

It is time to come home to a place where education breeds responsibility and responsibility breeds behavior – behavior that is moral and right and pure. Behavior that improves our families, improves our neighborhoods, improves our broader culture and world. Behavior that even improves each of us as individuals.

It is time to come home to our Wesleyan heritage. A heritage grounded not only in the teachings of John Wesley but of Jesus Christ. Teachings that call for a life of holiness, a life of obedience to God’s scripture, and the ‘methods of holy living. A heritage that sets the standard and expectation of a life that is healthy and makes sense in a world that is suffering and broken.

In a day when we are told that it is difficult to even understand what the definition of “is” is . . .

In a day when we teach courses on ethics which refuse to discuss the personal moral issues of honesty and truthfulness . . .

In a day when even Christian Colleges do not mention Jesus in their brochures and some even excuse using the Lord’s name in vain . . .

It is time to come home.

Welcome home to Oklahoma Wesleyan University: a university where Jesus is Lord!

This is who we are! This is who we *should* be! This is who we *will always* be!

WELCOME HOME!

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