



The Disgrace of American Universities

Across the country, American college and university students who express their Christian faith have come under attack and discrimination for expressing their beliefs. Just in the last year, a student was asked to hide or remove a cross necklace on two separate occasions. At another university an instructor ordered a student in a class assignment to stomp on a piece of paper with the word “Jesus” written on it. At still another university a dozen religious organizations lost official recognition because they refused to admit “all comers” to their organization. Meanwhile, universities are kicking InterVarsity Christian Fellowship chapters off campus for the offense of requiring that their leaders declare themselves Christian.

Most of these attacks on Christian college students and groups stem from disagreements about homosexuality and abortion. For example, gay students at George Washington University have organized a coordinated campaign to oust the Catholic chaplain because of his anti-abortion and “anti-homosexual” views. Pro-life students at the University of Alabama were promptly ordered by the administration to remove an anti-abortion display because it offended a few other students. Such objections occur under policies of “non-discrimination” and “toleration” found in most colleges’ regulations.

How expressing one’s religious belief in public is discriminatory is often left unexplained. The rule seems to be that if a single student complains about being offended by a Christian espousal of faith, then the administration steps in. A reasonable person might ask one of these administrators, “Are you discriminating against Christians when you throw them off campus or tell a Christian that he/she should not wear a cross? Is it not discrimination, a violation of free speech, to tell a pro-life group that they cannot display an aborted fetus or an unborn baby in the early stages of development? What happens to the constitutional right of free association when a group cannot place qualifications on its leaders?”

Of course, toleration is not the real issue. If it were, college administrations would not promote offensive plays such as *The Vagina Monologues* that appear annually at most college campuses across the country. Common sense might suggest that colleges and universities should be places of debate, engagement and different viewpoints. And, here’s a radical thought: Is not college supposed to be about training moral leaders and citizens for our nation?

A Litany of Anti-Christian Bias

The attacks on Christians at college are as multitudinous as biblical locusts—too many to count, a horde. It’s worth recounting a few of these incidents to convey what’s going on in our universities and colleges. There is an unprecedented assault on Christians on campus.

In the last several years, 15 InterVarsity Christian Fellowship chapters have been asked to leave college campuses. Why? The reason given is that they failed to meet non-discrimination university policies because these chapters require leaders to be, of all things, Christians. Why not require black student alliances or Hispanic student groups to permit non-black or non-Hispanic members, or require student physics clubs to allow non-physics majors in leadership positions? These kinds of student groups have signed non-discriminatory declarations because they understand that the likelihood of their groups being taken over by another group is exactly nil. Student Christian groups, however, have faced organized groups seeking to attain membership and leadership positions in order to change foundational principles.

Typical of the pressure brought against InterVarsity Christian Fellowship chapters was the action taken by the State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo. The chapter was suspended after their openly gay treasurer agreed to resign because he refused to accept scripture

teachings that condemn homosexual acts. A gay-lesbian student group filed a complaint with the student association with oversight over campus groups. The InterVarsity chapter at SUNY-Buffalo declared that anyone could join the organization, but leaders must comply with the tenets of the group. As a result, the student association suspended the chapter and launched an investigation into discrimination on campus.

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship is not the only Christian organization that has come under siege. In 2010, four Christian student groups were placed on provisional status at Vanderbilt University after a gay student filed a complaint against a Christian fraternity because he was asked to leave due to his openly gay behavior. The University of North Carolina at Greensboro suspended a pro-abstinence, anti-abortion student organization because it restricted membership to Christians. The administration informed the group that because it was not associated with any particular church, it could not restrict its membership. Only after a protest and the threat of legal action did the administration back down.

A similar story unfolded at San Diego State University when a Christian fraternity and sorority were stripped of funding, the right to meet on campus, and permission to post materials on campus because they stood against premarital sex and advocated marriage between a man and woman only. The fraternity and sorority filed suit in 2005, but this February the Supreme Court refused to hear the case. In a 2010 decision, the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in *Christian Legal Society v. Martinez* that universities can force religious and political student organization to admit members and leaders who do not share the group's beliefs. So much for the constitutional principle of free association.

Harassment comes in other guises as well. In the summer of 2013, an official at Sonoma State University in California ordered a student, Audrey Jarvis, working at a first-year orientation fair, to remove or hide her cross necklace because other students might—yes, might—be offended by a two-inch-long symbol of Christianity. The official ordering this suppression of religious symbols claimed that he was following the policy of Timothy P. White, the chancellor of the 23-school California State system, against wearing religious items. Audrey Jarvis is a practicing Catholic. Only under the threat of litigation did the university administration issue a profuse apology to her. Does it really take a lawyer to force administrators to

see the outrage of demanding that a student, who after all is paying tuition at a public university, hide her Christian faith and beliefs?

If a fortunate Christian student escapes the eye of university administrators, there is always the classroom to bring him into line. At Florida Atlantic University, Ryan Rotela, a devout Mormon, revealed that his instructor Deandre Poole in the Intercultural Communications class ordered him to write the word Jesus on a sheet of paper, then put the paper on the floor and “stomp on it.” He told the instructor, “With due respect to your authority as a professor, I do not believe what you told us to do was appropriate. I believe it was unprofessional and I was deeply offended by what you told me to do.” He claimed the instructor gave him a poor grade for the assignment. He took his complaint to Poole's supervisor, but was ignored. Poole holds a Ph.D. from Howard University and claims to be writing a book on Obamamania. (We can bet that she is not about to stomp on Obama's photo.)

The administration refuses to discuss the incident because of privacy laws, but defended the academic assignment that is found in the assigned textbook, *Intercultural Communication: A Contextual Approach*, now in its 5th edition. Perhaps the name of the course and the textbook tells us all about intercultural communications in college—or how not to communicate with people of different cultures, especially if they are Christians—but one can hardly imagine a textbook assignment for Muslim students to draw a picture of Mohammed or Allah and spit on it. That might be discriminatory, racist and insensitive. Universities today feel they must teach (indoctrinate) students about “tolerance” and “diversity”—and to be intolerant of the alleged “bigots” such as Christians.

When Is Diversity Not Diverse?

When forcing Christian groups off campus, cutting their funding, or requiring them to hide their beliefs about abortion and homosexuality, university administrators claim that their actions are about diversity and toleration. Diversity is narrowly defined as requiring inclusiveness toward gays on campus and women who choose abortions. It is not about whether gay students are being harassed or physically assaulted. Nor is it about pro-life groups closing down student health centers or dormitories or student tables distributing contraceptives or providing abortion counseling.

One of the ironies of university policies to promote “diversity” is that often the Christian groups that have

come under attack are ethnically diverse. Take, for example, the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship chapter at the University of Michigan, which was forced off campus because it violated the university's non-discrimination policy. The chapter was the Asian InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at Michigan. The controversy began when the chapter refused to revise its chapter constitution. The group was summoned by an administrator and ordered to change its club's constitution to allow non-Christians to become leaders. Sara Chang, an InterVarsity member, and the other students decided to stand firm on their faith. She told Fox News that "For us, there is no other option than to hold to the tenets of our faith. We want to model a lifestyle of integrity. Holding the Bible as the inspired, divine word of God and seeing the commands for us to choose leaders who have a vibrant faith in Jesus—is obviously something very important that we want to continue to uphold."

Perhaps in an understatement, Greg Jao, InterVarsity's national field director, said after the decision, "The university is sending the message that religious voices are suspect and should be marginalized. I think it sends the message that the university does not understand the nature of religious beliefs and the convictions of religious students."

Jao might be correct in giving administrators the benefit of the doubt. It might be, though, that these administrators understand fully the convictions of religious students—specifically Christian students—and do not like those convictions. University administrators can tolerate professors making outrageous anti-American and anti-Christian declarations in the classroom; promote *The Vagina Monologues* on campus; create segregated gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgendered dormitories on campus; and require faculty, staff, and students to undertake online and on-ground training classes in diversity and ethnic/gender sensitivity; but won't dream of having a university-sponsored forum on "What Does It Mean to Be a Christian." In their hearts, too many administrators believe, we suspect, that Christianity is the source of intolerance, war and unearned privilege in today's world.

Christians are depicted, as suggested in these attacks, as the intolerant ones on campus. If they just went away, everyone could sing kumbaya. Christians are targeted as uncompassionate. This is the case at George Washington University, where Fr. Greg Schaffer, the Catholic chaplain, came under fire for his beliefs. Two gay seniors initiated a campaign to ban Fr. Schaffer from campus for his anti-homosexual and anti-abortion beliefs. A formal complaint

has been filed with the administration to remove him from his post. What did Fr. Schaffer do to become a target? Did he advocate that homosexual students be discriminated against and not be admitted to George Washington University? No. Instead he encouraged gay students to lead a celibate lifestyle. It might be added that Fr. Schaffer also encourages straight students to abstain from sex before they are married. As a Catholic, he believes sex before marriage is a sin, so does this mean that he is discriminating against unmarried students as well?

Students and parishioners at the George Washington University Cardinal Newman Center rallied around Fr. Schaffer. Dawn Eden, a Catholic author and speaker, told the Catholic News Agency, "I have never seen Fr. Greg be less than compassionate to any student on an issue of sexuality. He's been instrumental in helping them to find healing in Christ."

What Happened to U.S. Universities?

Today's universities and schools have become the front line in the war against Christianity in the United States. American universities were not always the hotbeds of secular, anti-religious biases that prevail in today's places of learning.

It's easy to forget that the country's first colleges were founded to train ministers and students to be Christian leaders. The mottos of Ivy League colleges reflect the religious origins of American higher education. Translated from Latin, these mottos read, "Light and Truth" (Yale University); "In God We Hold" (Brown University); "Under God's Power" (Princeton University); "Laws Without Morals Are Useless" (University of Pennsylvania); "Truth" (Harvard University); and "The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness" (Dartmouth University).

Throughout the 19th century, college curriculum revolved around moral instruction. College presidents were seen as moral instructors. The common textbook found in most colleges was Francis Wayland's *Elements of Moral Science*, first published in 1835 and undergoing many editions. In this book, Wayland combined Christian and Enlightenment thought through Scottish common-sense philosophy. He was president of Brown University and pastor of the First Baptist Church in Providence, Rhode Island. This combination of being a university president and minister was not at all unusual in the 19th century.

So what happened to American higher education? This story is a complicated one that began with a movement

by educators and professors in the late 19th century to secularize colleges. Often trained by German socialist professors, these new “reformers” called for education to reject “deductive” learning, based on Aristotelian and Christian principles, in favor of “inductive” learning founded on natural science and social sciences. Colleges and universities, they declared, should be places for training the leaders and experts for the new age of industry, science and larger government. They persuaded donors to replace old-fashioned religious presidents with practical and scientific men (and later women). The core of education would not be moral or religious education, but scientific education. Professors should be trained in the new sciences and social sciences. Business schools were created and moral education was replaced by practical education. University officials in effect told donors, “Leave the running of your university or college to us. Just give us your money. And to ensure that we don’t come under attack from religious fanatics or mossbacks in the community, let us hire our professors and let us have a lifetime appointment through tenure.”

It was a great scheme, and it worked for the new scientific-minded professoriate. Formerly religious universities and colleges became secularized. Christian moral education became an antiquated concept. These institutions might not have promoted Christianity, but they were not labelling religious students as enemies of the people either. This came later, perhaps beginning as a generation of radicals from the 1960s became today’s administrators and professors.

Few people believe that colleges or universities can be returned to the days of Francis Wayland. Those of us who believe in traditional religious values do demand that our

universities and colleges respect students who profess and act on their Judeo-Christian faith.

How can we ensure that universities and colleges respect religious students? Disputes can be taken to the courts when necessary, and public interest lawyers such as the Thomas More Society do heroic work handling religious-liberty cases. On a larger scale, alumni can tell those professional fundraisers and alumni representatives that they are not giving the college a dime until the administration stops harassing students just because they have religious beliefs that are shared by the majority of Americans. University administrators and professors might not like that their students are religious, but they should not expect us to stand back while they wage war on the faith of our young and our forefathers.

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