

RELIGION OF THE HEART: EXPELLED FROM THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

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With the arrival of the German university model in the United States in the 1800s, faith in the scientific method slowly displaced religious faith as the ultimate authority in the university. The historic tension variously described as “faith vs. knowledge,” “faith vs. learning,” or “faith vs. reason,” was not mutually exclusive until the 20th century. Influenced principally by Darwinism and the German university, faith in the scientific method alone was viewed as the path to progress. As this view became normative in the American university, religion and the study of the Judeo/Christian heritage gradually disappeared.

Much was lost in the modern university when it suppressed religion, but no greater loss has been evident than that of traditional morality and moral leadership. This paper describes how this loss resulted in intellect and morality becoming disconnected, how “religion of the heart” became “anti-intellectual,” and how and why it was expelled from the university. It is a story of the “arrogance of intellect” and the loss of freedom within higher education that began in the colonial period with the occurrence of the Great Awakening. By the early 1900’s, John Dewey and other modernist thinkers advocated a “new moral order,” rejecting religion and morality and basing its development on the belief that the scientific method alone contributed to human good. Thus, the “old” morality (i.e. the Judeo/Christian heritage) had to be destroyed before the new could be created. This notion was reinforced in the 1960s by Richard Hofstadter, who claimed that intellect and traditional morality were incompatible and that religion of the heart was anti- intellectual.

Excising the old morality and with it religion of the heart, has undermined the university’s historic commitment to truth, freedom, and moral integrity. From the perspective of a Christian worldview, it is imperative that the university take steps to restore its moral leadership, and steps are recommended by the authors.

Abstract of paper presented at the INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CHRISTIAN STUDIES’ annual “Christian Worldview Conference with a Global Vision” themed, *The Engaging Our World: From the Ivory Tower to Global Impact Conference*, July 17-19, 2008, at the Hilton Hotel, Kansas City, Missouri.