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## The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship, by George Marsden

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when discussions turn to the academic programs. Here is where Marsden's practical insight into why religious (Christian) beliefs are meaningful and useful is important. Having a religious frame of reference does make a difference in how the data of human experience are seen and understood. In Marsden's terms, Christianity offers some questions to be answered, some theories to be examined, and some projects to be undertaken, all of which might be overlooked or not be of interest to other observers.

Although Marsden acknowledges that Christianity not only asks the questions, but gives the answers, he points out that it leads the Christian searcher for truth to discover whether there are other reasons (other than revelation) that would support the Christian position. He also demonstrates how religion makes certain projects and life choices more attractive and, hence, encourages action or behavior that otherwise might be dismissed as irrelevant.

In sum, what makes a difference is the Christian worldview. It has an effect on what is selected for teaching, what is used for examples, what attitudes towards life are conveyed, what life-projects are spotlighted, what meaning is given to human existence. What makes a Catholic school unique in its academic program is not that teachers somehow skillfully weave tenants of Church teaching through the academic curriculum. No, to do that potentially distorts both the secular and the sacred. The real difference is at a deeper level, as Marsden clearly illustrates: that all culture and knowledge is presented in a different light, it has a different meaning, because of the good news of salvation.

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*Reviewed by Diana Stano, O.S.U.*

**I**n *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, George Marsden presents an informative and intriguing approach to the question of the relationship between religious faith and intellectual scholarship. He begins by setting the historical context, citing the current reaction to the long-established and privileged position the Christian perspective held in higher education. The presentation sets a rather compelling stage from which to consider the relevance of faith to scholarship in all academic areas. The author then interweaves various positions related to this idea and intersperses brief examples of how such integration might be developed. Unfortunately, it is easy to get lost in the rhetorical and theoretical positions articulated in order to establish the valid-

ity and value of considering a faith perspective. He suggests there are no identifiable Christian schools of thought.

Marsden sets forth standards for academic pursuits, including efforts to be objective and unbiased, while acknowledging that each person brings a unique perspective shaped by historical, cultural, educational, and religious influences. The impossibility of complete analytic and interpretive objectivity provides a basis, according to Marsden, for including a variety of perspectives in scholarly work. Marsden attempts to explicate the underlying assumptions often used by scholars which cannot be established on empirical grounds. He states, "...faith in something or other informs all scholarship" (1997, p. 10). The book then becomes a philosophical discourse on issues of ultimate truth, knowledge, and reality. It clearly focuses on the issue of all scholars reflecting on their own scholarship and underlying assumptions.

The structure of his exposition is to present a proposition in the context of counter positions. He argues that responsible scholarship requires the consideration of all credible viewpoints, including those premised on religious assumptions. However, he does make it clear that an individual's identification of a religious perspective cannot be taken to assume the person speaks for "the" religious perspective. This clearly makes it problematic as to whether a definitive Christian point of view can be developed in any intellectual arena. This certainly leads to problematic concerns of how actually to establish a clearly identifiable Christian school of thought in any given intellectual arena.

Marsden establishes the need for approaches other than just the scientific, objective model of inquiry which has heretofore dominated our intellectual tradition. Implicit in Marsden's position is that there are multiple ways of knowing. His notion is similar to that developed by John Haught in his book, *Science and Religion from Conflict to Conversation* (1995). Haught claims that contrast is necessary for a more integrated picture of reality. Haught uses the notion of contrast to demonstrate that theology and science both include elements of social construction and that there is not a fundamental opposition between them.

Marsden establishes a compelling argument for academic institutions to reflect on the manner in which faith perspectives interface with academic scholarship. He makes a contribution to further the discussion of Catholic identity in higher education today and the implications for scholarship in Catholic higher education. His thought-provoking presentation provides insight into the already existing conversation and can help to move it forward. The book challenges the reader to be more explicit in the expression of faith and to ponder the implications of faith for the intellectual realm of learning.

Consistent with the content of the book, I think that it is helpful to mention my own perspective, which has influenced this review. As a woman reli-

gious and newly appointed president of a small, Catholic, liberal arts college for women, I come from a background in science where I have always found the discussion of faith and the intellectual life fascinating. For me, Marsden's book reads as a philosophical text which has the potential to stir heated discussion among interested and informed faculty.

### REFERENCE

Haught, J. (1995). *Science and religion: From conflict to conversation*. New York: Paulist Press.

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*Reviewed by Robert W. McElroy*

Sometimes in the course of a specific intellectual project, one comes upon a topic which dwarfs in importance the original focus of inquiry. This was the experience of George Marsden, who examined in *The Soul of the American University* (1994) how American university culture, itself a product of Protestant influences in so many ways, came to reject the legitimacy of scholarship explicitly shaped by perspectives of religious faith. In "An Unscientific Postscript" to that work, Marsden outlined a notion of "Christian scholarship" which should be welcomed in the contemporary university setting as an appropriate and enriching element in scholarly life.

The cascade of criticism which followed the publication of *The Soul of the American University* centered largely on the charge that Marsden had overdrawn the hostility of the academy to religious belief and to the scholarship of religious believers. In his newest book, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, Marsden has wisely resisted the temptation to focus primarily upon this issue of how hostile university life is to faith-informed scholarship, and instead has chosen to examine the far more interesting question of what Christian scholarship is and how it might be beneficial in the academic life of the contemporary university. Marsden's goal is a modest but rich one: "...to take a step toward clarifying what the ancient enterprise of relating faith and learning might mean in the academy today" (1997, p. ii).

It is important to note that Marsden is not speaking of a Christian scholarship which is confined merely to theology or to the study of religious life and practice in human society. No, the "faith-informed" scholarship he proposes to house in the mainstream of university life is much broader than that, touching upon the fields of history, ethics, the arts, economics, law, and even

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