

## **Between Inculcation and Inquiry: The Virtue of Tolerance in the Liberal Arts Tradition**

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### 1. Introduction

I was recently afforded an outsider's view of the Christian liberal arts college by the American author, Wallace Stegner. In one of his finest novels, *Crossing to Safety*, the fictive narrator, Larry Morgan, describes an event surely dreaded by all young academics as they enter the job market. Having landed a one-year position in the English Department of the University of Wisconsin, he finds out early in the spring semester that his appointment is not being renewed. He had settled in, gotten along with his colleagues, and worked furiously. In fact, he had out-published all the other members of the department. But he published literature rather than the criticism of literature--and that the tenured faculty, evidently, found threatening. A strategic error. Now he must rejoin the dismal ranks of the migrant scholar, and look elsewhere for gainful employment. As it turned out, the results of his initial efforts in the job search were both meager and unpromising. "A dozen letters had produced only a nibble," he writes. "It came from a Lutheran college in Illinois, and I might have pursued even that possibility if they had not wanted me, before further discussion, to declare my belief in the Apostles' Creed, the Augsburg Confession, and the principles of higher Christian education." (Stegner, 153)

The passage caused me to laugh. But for two quite different reasons: the greater portion of my laughter was what theorists of humor call the laughter of recognition. Having made my academic home at a Christian liberal arts college, I was all too familiar with the concerns for religious orthodoxy, the creedal tests, and the incessant discussion of the principles of Christian higher education. But the remaining portion of my laughter--roughly two-fifths, I would estimate--was laughter at the incongruity of the Lutheran request. In that context, it seemed so quaint and provincial, even irrelevant. Why should a promising young author like Larry Morgan, recently published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, have to profess an allegiance to the Augsburg Confession in order to teach English in Illinois?

The 1940 statement of the American Association of University Professors on academic freedom recognizes the right of religious bodies to establish educational institutions with such requirements--as long as the limitations of academic freedom are clearly stated in writing at the time of appointment. (AAUP, 3) In this respect, our Lutheran college did well. The requirements were stated up front. But if, as the AAUP statement maintains, academic freedom is "fundamental to the advancement of truth" (AAUP, 3), then why would any academic institution limit such freedom? Why hamper the search for truth with such extraneous requirements? Apparently the only explanation conceivable by mainline defenders of academic freedom is that such institutions are not really interested in the search for truth; rather, they are in the business of imposing religious dogma upon their students; they are "instruments of propaganda" (Marsden, 307), not research; they were built for inculcation, not inquiry.

According to the greater lights associated with the founding of the AAUP, institutions of higher learning with a strong attachment to a religious tradition should remain “colleges” in both pretention and self-designation. To attempt to become universities, or to call themselves “universities,” without abandoning their religious requirements, would be an act of bad faith, or a piece of false advertising. Teaching is the central and defining mission of the college, and teaching can be fairly conducted according to dogma, if students are willing to subject themselves to it. But universities are the home of research, and genuine research must be free. In his 1902 essay on academic freedom, John Dewey--the first president of the AAUP--stated that although ecclesiastical bodies have a right to establish and maintain educational institutions, these institutions could not legitimately lay claim to the title of “university” (Marsden, 288) In 1914, Nicholas Murray Butler of Columbia University concurred: “If preconceived views must be taught and if certain preconceived opinions must be held, then the institution whose teachers are so restricted is not a university.” (Marsden, 300) More recently, Robert McIver, in his book, *Academic Freedom in Our Time*, claimed that, “Those who advocate that the university should take a definite religious stand are in their proselytizing zeal committing themselves to a total perversion of the function of the university.” (McIver, 138). To this way of thinking, the idea of a “Reformed university” is utterly oxymoronic, a rank contradiction in terms, an ill-advised attempt to create a homogenous solution by mixing the oil of religious dogma with the water of free inquiry.

The honorific title of “university,” then, should be kept from any institution that requires creedal subscription by its faculty as a condition of hire. This sentiment has been expressed by voices closely associated with the AAUP since the turn of the century. In the last twenty-five years, however, even the right of undergraduate colleges to make use of religious desiderata in hiring and firing has been seriously questioned. In its 1970 interpretations of the statement on academic freedom, the AAUP declares that, “Most church-related institutions no longer need or desire the departure from the principle of academic freedom implied in the 1940 Statement, and we do not now endorse such a departure.”(AAUP, 5) The first part of this statement is a historical observation, which is intended to serve as cause for hope: although church related colleges have been allowed the right--under specified conditions--to limit academic freedom, it now appears that fewer and fewer are minded to do so. The second part withdraws an “endorsement”. What could Association mean by this? Presumably departures from the principle of academic freedom are still permitted, but they are now no longer endorsed. But it is not clear that such departures ever were endorsed. So perhaps the statement is simply designed to communicate the growing displeasure of the AAUP over any college that would continue to exercise its right of limiting academic freedom; as far as I know, the Association has not officially withdrawn its recognition of that right.

At any rate, such rhetoric is enough to make any representative of a Christian college feel defensive. David Horner, President of North Park College and Theological Seminary, admits that while the principle of academic freedom “presupposes a position of institutional neutrality with respect to all issues of truth,”(Horner, 36) Christian colleges are “patently not neutral as institutions on all issues of truth.”(Horner, 38) The Coalition of Christian Colleges, for instance, requires that all of its member institutions hire only confessing Christians as full-time faculty. This requirement, he says, is “a clearly non-academic consideration.”(Horner, 38) A Christian college must limit

academic freedom because such limitation is “necessary to support the institution’s purposes not only of learning but also of faith.” (Horner, 39)

Given the tension between the demands of free inquiry and the need for inculcation, Christian colleges, Horner suggests, have two options: either redefine academic freedom; or limit academic freedom as presently defined, but be up front and principled about it. He chooses the second option. But one gets the impression that he does so with a twinge of bad conscience. By maintaining strict neutrality and placing no restrictions on academic freedom, universities, it seems, demonstrate that they are utterly serious about the search for truth; by restricting academic freedom on the basis of religious dogma, church-related colleges show that they are not, and they might as well admit it. They have non-academic concerns that intersect and restrict academic activity on their campuses.

In this paper I propose to abandon the defensive posture and explore the first option--the “redefinition” of academic freedom. I will argue that it is possible for creedal affirmations to enhance, rather than restrict, academic freedom. Thus, on the view I intend to develop, the religious tradition of a church-related college--or university, for that matter--should be seen from the inside as an academic asset rather than an academic liability, as a resource rather than a restriction. Furthermore, I will argue that all research is constrained, that the “free” search for truth is always bound by certain “preconceived opinions.” Hence religiously determined boundaries for inquiry as such need not be the source of intellectual embarrassment; they need not set off the research conducted at a church-related academy as an exception to the rule.

Having said that, I do not deny that creedal requirements can and often do impede the pursuit of the academic mission of a religiously identified institution of higher learning. They can, for one thing, be ill-conceived. The creedal net may be too fine, excluding those who could in good faith make a genuine contribution to the mission of the institution. On the other hand, the creedal net may be too wide, admitting those who are in fact hostile to the religious tradition from which the institution takes its basic orientation. Furthermore, I do not deny that religiously identified institutions of higher learning can be and often are authoritarian and intolerant, thus creating an academic atmosphere thoroughly inhospitable to the life of the mind. I do not think that this a problem unique to religious institutions. Intolerance is an equal opportunity employer, and retains many organizations--both religious and secular--on its payroll. But it must be opposed wherever it is found. So, while I argue for tolerance of religiously identified institutions of higher learning, I will also argue for tolerance within those institutions as well. I do not think that the simple presence of creedal requirements makes them intolerant; but I think the way in which they relate to those requirements can and often does make them so.

## 2. Academic Freedom

In this section I will argue that it is not uncommon for people to limit one kind of freedom in order to promote or enhance another kind of freedom, and that the limitation of academic freedom by church-related colleges can be seen as just such an exercise; furthermore I shall argue that since such limitations are voluntarily assumed by those

who join the faculty of such colleges, they count as self-limitations and therefore do not infringe upon the autonomy of the faculty of such colleges.

The possible meanings of the term “freedom” are legion, and it not always clear which one is intended when claims to freedom are made. If I were to encounter a student running down the hall of a classroom building shouting “I’m free!,” I would not know what she meant until I was in possession of the relevant background information. She could be declaring that she was free from the clutches of an over possessive boyfriend, from the demands of a philosophy class she just dropped, or, if it were the last day of the final examination period, from schoolwork in general. Or, coming from the counseling center, she might have found sudden release from an addictive disorder; or, coming from chapel, release from the power of a particular sin in her life. To find out what claims to freedom mean in any particular case the term “freedom” must be indexed to a person (or group), that person’s (or group’s) desires, and a situation in which the fulfillment of those desires is perceived to be threatened by some constraint.

In the tradition of liberal political theory, freedom means freedom from coercive external constraints. I am free when I have the right to do or say what I please without interference from others, as long as what I do or say does not interfere with the right of others to do the same. In his well-known essay entitled “Two Concepts of Liberty,” Isaiah Berlin calls this kind of freedom “negative freedom.” It is a response to the question: “What is the area within which the subject--a person or group of persons--is or should be left to do or be what he wants to do or be, without interference by other persons?”(Berlin, 7) Clearly this is the kind of freedom the AAUP has in mind in its pronouncements on academic freedom. I enjoy academic freedom when my teaching and research can be conducted in the absence of coercive external constraints--such as the threat of dismissal--based on non-academic criteria such as political viewpoint or religious persuasion.

But constraints on my activity can also be internal. Such constraints would detract from my ability to exercise my freedom in the absence of external constraints. I may enjoy the right to free speech, but if I suffer from a serious speech impediment, or I am regularly paralyzed at the prospect of public speaking, then I am incapable of exercising my freedom of speech even when I have the opportunity to do so. Although I am “free from” all external constraints on my speech, I am not “free to” to speak. The presence of internal constraints renders me incapable of doing so. If those internal constraints are removed, then I am free to make good on the opportunities I have to act. This kind of freedom Berlin dubs “positive freedom.” Whereas negative freedom secures for me the opportunity to do what I want, positive freedom means that I actually possess the ability to do so. One entails the absence of external constraints; the other the absence of internal constraints. (For this reason Joel Feinberg claims that “freedom to” can be wholly analyzed in terms of “freedom from” [Feinberg, 10].)

Although positive and negative freedom are conceptually distinct, they are frequently related to each other after the fashion of a zero-sum game. We must often place constraints on our activities, thus limiting our freedom in the negative sense, in order to enhance or promote a certain ability, thus increasing our freedom in the positive sense. We do so because we judge that among our desires some desires are more important than others and that they can’t all be realized in the same life. If I desire to be able to run 10 kilometers in 38 minutes, then I will go into training--that is, I will place

certain constraints on my diet and time accordingly. I will not allow myself to eat whatever I want at the moment, nor will I allow myself to do whatever I want between, say, 3:30 and 4:30 on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons. The constraints that I impose upon myself are real limitations. But since I impose them upon myself for the sake of enhancing an ability I take to be important, few would be tempted to claim that I had lost my freedom in doing so. If such constraints were imposed upon me by the state, however, and backed by coercive measures--if everyone in the state of Michigan, for instance, were compelled to run 10 kilometers three times a week because Governor Engler thought it would be good for them to do so--then I would have indeed lost a degree of freedom.

Rarely do we carry out our projects in strict isolation. We usually do what we do in concert with others. To follow my example: to enhance my running abilities, I may join others in a running club. Together we may agree to submit to a training regimen that we think will maximally enhance our ability to run great distances at a high rate of speed. Perhaps membership in such a club would be conditional upon the following the regimen. There will be times, no doubt, when I find the regimen onerous and burdensome. It will conflict with my transient desires for junk food and free time. Yet I stick to it because I judge that the ability it enhances to be more important than complete freedom with respect to what I do and eat.

Again, few would be tempted to say that I was imposed upon unfairly by the group I have joined--for I joined it voluntarily, knowing what the conditions of membership were. People who see no value in maintaining radiant physical health, or who have no use for the "pathos of distance"--as Nietzsche called it--that can be had by running a lot faster than others in competition, may wonder why I would subject myself to such a regimen. Why would I forfeit my freedom to do and eat as I please to the rule of this obsessive group? But I don't see it this way at all; I am willing to have my negative freedom constrained in order to enhance my positive freedom; to reduce my opportunities in order to increase my abilities--because I care about those abilities.

The trade-offs we effect between our positive and negative freedoms depend upon what Charles Taylor calls our "background understanding" (Taylor, 218)--an array of implicit judgments about what is important and worthy of pursuit, and how best to pursue it. Such background understandings vary from person to person, group to group, tradition to tradition. So the practices suggested by one will seem strange to those operating on the basis of another. What enhances the freedom of one merely inhibits the freedom of another.

Perhaps you can see where I'm going with this. The academic year of '80-81 marked my last year in residence as a graduate student in philosophy at Duquesne University. At the conclusion of the spring semester I attended a party for the philosophy department at Tim Casey's house on the North side of Pittsburgh. With all my coursework behind me, I stood and chatted excitedly under a clear evening sky, a cold can of Iron City in one hand and my infant daughter on the other. I can remember telling one of my fellow grad students--with an air of happy anticipation--that I had been offered a position at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She frowned. I don't think she was familiar with Calvin College in particular. But the name "Calvin" was enough. "Well," she said to me, "I guess that's good--if you can put up with the religious dogma." She was assuming, of course, that since we were philosophers we had no use for religious

authority, that we were committed to basing all our beliefs on the deliverances of reason, not the dictates of a church, and that, for the likes of us, teaching at a church-related college would be a constant threat to our intellectual integrity.

I let the remark pass. If I had had the time, however, I would have tried to explain that I actually agreed with the religious dogma of the institution that had offered me a position--not only agreed with it, but heartily embraced it as only an ex fundamentalist who read himself into the reformed tradition could. So the credal requirements hardly represented a form of external coercion for me--I identified with them wholeheartedly. Granted, they were real limitations on my belief: as a member of the faculty, I couldn't believe just anything in matters religious. But they were limitations I willed for myself. I did not take myself to be entering the academic equivalent of a jail--as her painful expression gave me to believe.

Credal requirements do not represent coercive constraints on those who agree with them in the first place; and they are not imposed upon those who do not agree with them. No one has to teach at a church-related college. They are limitations; but they are self-limitations, and therefore do not represent a loss of freedom, but rather an exercise of freedom. "Persons who work from religious perspectives, after all, do so voluntarily," notes George Marsden in his recent study of religion in the American academy. "The same is true of people who choose to teach at institutions that set some religious boundaries. Since their guiding viewpoints are held voluntarily, their freedom is hardly infringed by choosing to work within those restrictions." (Marsden, 435).

But this fact does not in itself spare the church-related college--or university--from the charge that it makes use of non-academic criteria in hiring, promoting, and firing; and that it compromises itself as an academic institution insofar as it makes use of these criteria. Suppose we had a running club that, in addition to its obligatory training regimen, also required its members to be Missouri Synod Lutherans. Why would a running club do such a thing? Why would it impose non-athletic criteria for membership in an athletic club? It seems like the only possible explanation for this is that the club is really trying to do two very different things at once: enhance running competitiveness, and provide Lutheran fellowship. Of course people have a right to form such a club. It's a free country. But if they were really serious about running--and about winning--why would they? Why restrict their membership to Missouri Synod Lutherans? They could be a more competitive athletic club if they opened their ranks to members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, and much more competitive if they simply dropped the religious requirement altogether.

The reaction we might have to the idea of a Lutheran running club, I am suggesting, approximates the reaction of a significant portion of today's academic community to the idea of a reformed university, or to any presently existing church related college. Granted, religious communities have a right to establish and maintain such academies. But why would they? Evidently because they have decidedly non academic purposes in mind. This perception is not only the perception of "outsiders"; it is often shared by "insiders" as well. Recall the statement of the president of North Park College: credal requirements are "a clearly non-academic consideration." (Horner, 38); they are established because the Christian college seeks to promote not only learning, but faith. (Horner, 39)

It is precisely at this point that the reformed tradition, as I understand it, begs to differ. Look at it this way: in the religious creeds we affirm what we take to be the best interpretation we have to date of the deep truth that has been revealed to us about ourselves and the world we live in. In them we derive a sense of our origin and destiny; our condition before God; our status in the universe; the virtues that befit a human being; and the basis of true human solidarity. We do not take this body of belief to be the simple product of human reflection, poetic invention, psychological need, or social interests; rather, we take it to be a response to God's gracious self-revelation, given to us through the agency of the church, so that our fundamental ignorance might be overcome. We ought to receive it gratefully, as one would receive a map and compass in the midst of a wilderness. For apart from some divine self-disclosure, we would remain in the dark about the deepest matters of human life.

Clearly this is not a matter of total irrelevance to the aims of the academy. For the academy is dedicated to the pursuit of truth. In expressing and constraining our belief about fundamental matters, the creeds--if they are right--serve to enhance our ability to track the truth about the world. That is, they enhance our positive freedom to know the truth by removing a key internal constraint: our abysmal ignorance of how things stand concerning God, ourselves, and the world we live in. In affirming the creeds, we advance our understanding of the truth. The creeds should be seen as an academic asset, not a liability. For we see light in God's light.

Yet the objection might still be lodged against the church-related college or university that, however much sense it might make to conduct inquiry on the basis of what one takes to be true, it is nonetheless a deficient mode of inquiry because certain beliefs are granted special immunity against doubt and question. In such settings, research is dogmatic; whereas in the secular university setting, research is free because nothing is sacred. Everything, in principle, is up for grabs.

Such an objection is based upon a naive epistemology. The search for truth is in fact always guided by "preconceived opinions" concerning the nature of the field under investigation, the most appropriate methods for ascertaining the truth in such a field, the criteria for appraising theories, explanations, interpretations, and the like. These preconceived opinions serve as "prior constraints" on the freedom of inquiry--so as to keep it in line, to ensure that it tracks the truth. Typically, the preconceptions by which inquiry is guided are not invented by individual inquirers, rather, they are inculcated within specific communities according to a tradition of inquiry. They are taken, for the most part, on faith. Although such preconceived opinions need not be unquestionable, they typically function as unquestioned dogma when the research program is in full operation.

In this light, research conducted at the church-related college is in principle no different when it is constrained by religious dogma. The college is an elective association of scholars working in a tradition of inquiry according to constraints it accepts and believes will assist it in tracking the truth about the world. In any tradition of inquiry, what is crucial is not whether there are prior constraints on research but whether reflection upon the prior constraints is possible when anomalies arise in the course of the research so constrained. Any tradition of inquiry--not just a religiously defined one--can atrophy, become rigid and inflexible, persist as frozen orthodoxy in the face of growing evidence that calls for its revision. The crucial point is that the institutions and

communities in which inquiry is conducted provide the appropriate mechanisms for periodic reflection upon its operating assumptions. In the reformed intellectual tradition we have good and definite reasons for doing this: we take the human intellect to be both finite and fallen, and therefore fallible. Our best interpretations of the truth that has been revealed to us may at any point fall short. They may be distorted by particular social interests, cultural bias, shared psychological needs, gender filters, and the like. So our own tradition motivates us to reflect upon that tradition, and to tolerate such reflection for the sake of the truth.

### 3. The Virtue of Tolerance

The present conflict between the ideal of academic freedom and the religious requirements of many church-related colleges is but a continuation of an age-old debate about the true meaning of liberal education. That debate, as reconstructed in some detail by Bruce Kimball, has been largely shaped by two traditions: the rhetorical and the philosophical. In the rhetorical tradition, which has its roots in the educational ideals of Isocrates, Cicero and Quintilian, liberal education seeks to form students in accord with the traditional values of the ambient society, and to fit them with the skills necessary to provide effective leadership within it. It is an education for the "free man" -and here I use the gender specific term advisedly--who has both the leisure and the inclination to become involved in civic affairs. Shaped in character according to the wisdom of his age through exposure to canonical texts in the study of grammar, he then learns how to make that wisdom eloquent and persuasive through training in rhetoric. Logic, as a method for discovering truth and testing opinion, plays a subordinate role. The goal of liberal education is to prepare citizens for positions of leadership in society, not to search out and critique its foundations.

The rhetorical ideal of liberal education was given Christian content in the patristic period, and after a brief eclipse during the heyday of speculative theology in the newly formed universities of the high middle ages, it re-emerged in the educational programs of the Renaissance and the schools of the Reformation. In the Lutheran tradition, Melancthon reasserted the priority of rhetoric over logic in the arts curriculum at Wittenberg. Calvin, himself trained in the humanist tradition, modeled the college at Geneva on the school in Strasbourg organized by Johannes Sturm, where a simple piety was combined with classical learning in order to cultivate a "wise and eloquent piety." From Geneva the rhetorical take on liberal education spread throughout the reformed countries. (Kimball, 94) Calvin College together with the other Reformed colleges represented at this conference stand in this rhetorical tradition of protestant education insofar as they continue to form their students according to an accepted table of values, instruct them in the wisdom of an authoritative text, and equip them with the skills necessary for effective leadership in society.

In the philosophical tradition, as Kimball characterizes it, liberal education acquires a markedly different sense and purpose. Here liberal education is not education of the free man according to an accepted tradition, but education in order to free men from an accepted tradition. (Kimball, 158) This tradition claims Socrates, rather than Isocrates, as its inspiration--Socrates, the first practitioner of detached critical reason, the relentless questioner of traditional values, the independent gadfly, the free thinker.

(Kimball, 116) As a model philosopher, Socrates subjected all opinions to searching inquiry, and liberal education should motivate and equip students to do the same. Inculcation according to received wisdom is diametrically opposed to the true aims of liberal education. As one philosophy professor put it: "The liberal arts curriculum is to liberate the student for the freedom of independent thinking....it is the task of philosophy to develop the skeptical attitude in the student."(Kimball,199) This ideal was first articulated in the Enlightenment, and went hand in hand with the rise of the modern research university, with its dedication to free inquiry, scientific method, specialized research, departmentalization along strict disciplinary lines, value neutrality, and the cultivation of a professionalized faculty.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries these two interpretations of the ideal of liberal education, represented by the church-related liberal arts college and the secular research university, came into conflict on American soil--and it is fair to say that the "philosophical" tradition of free inquiry easily gained the upper hand. One by one, in the name of academic excellence, liberal arts colleges loosened and eventually relinquished their religious ties as they modeled themselves on emerging research universities. By comparison to such universities, the colleges in their former state appeared to be intellectually backward, to be burdened by an "epistemological dogmatism" as Kimball puts it (Kimball, 38); there was, he writes, "a dogmatism underlying the belief that the task of liberal education is to transmit wisdom rather than to teach the student how to search for it...the liberal arts master presented to his students a view of life and the world that was to be appropriated and repeated, not challenged." (Kimball, 111)

In this section I will argue that the belief cited by Kimball presents us with a false dichotomy. We need not choose between free inquiry or dogmatic inculcation. For it is possible both to transmit wisdom and to impart the skills requisite in the search for it. Instruction at church-related institutions can be based on religious conviction without being authoritarian or dogmatic when true tolerance is practiced in the classroom. Moreover, creedal requirements for faculty need not count as dead weights on inquiry, provided that the right form of tolerance is practiced at the institutional level as well. At the conclusion I will suggest that the greatest threats to academic freedom in the church-related institution are not the religious boundaries set on inquiry, but the manifold cultures of intolerance that effectively suppress the free and open discussion of the full range of opinions consistent with such boundaries.

First a few comments on tolerance. I take tolerance to be a virtue. That is not only to say that I think it is a good thing, but to identify it as a character trait, a settled disposition to behave in a certain way. For that is what is a virtue is. If I possess the virtue of honesty, then I am disposed to tell the truth; if I possess the virtue of generosity, then I am disposed to share my resources with those in need. Like honesty and generosity, tolerance is also a virtue. But to what behavior am I disposed if I possess the virtue of tolerance? Roughly: I am disposed to put up with actions and beliefs with which I disagree. I am tolerant when I allow for actions that I think are wrong, when I permit the expression of opinions that conflict with my own.

Furthermore, I take tolerance to be a virtue of the Aristotelean type. This is to say that true tolerance is a mean between an extreme of deficiency and an extreme of excess. If I tolerate too little, then I am intolerant. But I can also tolerate too much. The fact that we do not have a ready term for this vice is indicative of our cultural situation. We tend

to think that the more one tolerates, the more virtuous one is. Typically we contrast the virtue of tolerance only with intolerance, the vice of deficiency; rarely with the vice of excess. But in practice we recognize that true tolerance has its limits. Most of us think it is right, for instance, not to tolerate racist speech or sexual harassment on campus. Toleration of everything is not a virtue, but a vice. True tolerance, as J. Budiszewski points out, is based upon judgment as to what should be tolerated and what should not. (Budiszewski, 7) Such judgment is based upon what we take the goods of human life to be, how those goods are ranked, and how they are best secured. We do not tolerate actions that bring about a greater evil than the evil of not tolerating them.

But why should any degree of tolerance be considered a virtue? Why should I tolerate any belief I think is false, or any action I take to be wrong? Why isn't tolerance as such a sign of spinelessness, or a lack of real conviction? The answer is that tolerance is justified in those cases where we judge that suppressing beliefs and actions with which we disagree would hinder or prevent the realization of a greater good. (see Budiszewski, 13) By tolerating that which we disagree with, we seek to protect an end against inappropriate means for attaining it. Let me give an example. Calvin College encourages regular chapel attendance on the part of its students; it does so because it believes that chapel attendance can be an important element in the development of the life of faith. In former days, it required chapel attendance. That is, it did not tolerate chapel non-attendance. Now it does. Why? Has Calvin lost its conviction that faith development is important? No, it no longer requires chapel attendance because, in the present judgment of the college, not tolerating chapel non-attendance would hinder the aim of faith development. True faith, and its expressions, are freely given; when constrained, cynicism sets in. If the end is true faith, mandatory chapel attendance is not the appropriate means to that end.

As teachers, we tolerate diversity of opinion in the classroom for similar reasons: not because we adopt an official stance of neutrality on all issues of truth--which is impossible anyway--but because, in our judgment, we think that the suppression of differences in opinion would frustrate the proper aims of liberal education. The presence of official dogma on campus does not guarantee that the instruction will be carried on in a dogmatic or authoritarian manner--although it can be, and often is. The key: the virtue of humility as inspired by the very dogma we accept concerning our finitude and falleness. We can believe certain things to be true, even with great deal of certainty. But we may be mistaken. The mere possibility of being mistaken, however, should not keep us from persisting in our convictions. We should only cease to persist when we are confronted with sufficient evidence to think we are wrong. And this possibility must be kept open by tolerating difference of opinion. To exercise the virtue of true tolerance in the classroom teaching, then, is not to hide my convictions, to present students with an "objective" or neutral account of an array of options and then allow them to choose according to personal preference. That is to trivialize the question of truth. Rather, I may teach according to my convictions and avoid the authoritarian imposition of belief upon unsuspecting students, if, in my teaching I also equip them with the intellectual skills and resources requisite for the critical evaluation of what I teach. To overstate the point only slightly: As a teacher, I will do every thing in my power such that if I am wrong, my students will be able to tell.

The example of true tolerance in teaching might shed some light on what true tolerance might look like at the institutional level in connection with research. The relation between the teacher and the student should be reflected in the relation between the religious community and the faculty of its educational institutions. Here I propose the following test: religious boundaries on inquiry are not authoritarian when the appropriate mechanism and protected space are provided for those boundaries to come up for re-examination when the anomalies that surface in inquiry guided by them so require. In the Reformed community, the need to secure space for periodic reflection upon the dogmatic boundaries set on inquiry follows from the very dogma that inform those boundaries in the first place. The doctrines of creation and fall, of human finiteness and fallenness, forbid us from ascribing final authority to any human creation. To do so is an act of idolatry. The creeds to which subscription is required may represent the best interpretation we have to date of God's self-disclosure in Christ and the Scriptures. But it would violate the sense of that very interpretation to hold that they are infallible. In a speech delivered on June 28, 1899, Abraham Kuyper claimed that if a professor at a Reformed university discovers anything in the Reformed past that was looked upon as true, but in fact conflicts with the Word of God as revealed in nature or in scripture, then it is that professor's duty "to reveal the error, and for God's sake, once more to cast [it] into the crucible and purge it out." (Kuyper, 12) My point is simply this: If it is the duty of professors at a Reformed university to root out error in the Reformed tradition, then it is also the duty of the Reformed university to grant them the permission to do so. To suppress all critical discussion of the creeds at the institutional level would be to adopt means that work against the end of having true belief on matters religious. A church-related institution of higher learning should encourage reflection within certain religious boundaries and reflection upon those religious boundaries. Ideally, we have nothing to lose by maintaining openness on this point: if, upon re-examination, the boundaries are judged to be appropriate, then they will receive fresh confidence; if they are not so judged, then we should be glad to revise them. (see J.S. Mill, 16)

I am inclined to think that the chief threat to genuine academic freedom at the Christian college, or a Reformed university, is not located in the confessional boundaries set on inquiry. They are, after all, in many respects quite generous. They do not require that one be a Dooyeweerdian or an analytic philosopher in philosophy, a new critic or a deconstructionist in literary studies, or a neo-institutionalist in economics. The virtues and vices of these approaches are not determined from the outset by the creeds; they are open to debate. Cases of outright conflict between the creeds and the results of inquiry are relatively rare, if nonetheless noteworthy. The real danger to academic freedom comes from the informal cultures of intolerance that can easily grow and embed themselves in any academic institution. They are sometimes subtle, and come in many forms: from a Board of Trustees that sees itself as an ideological agent of certain elements in the college's constituency; to a President with a pronounced authoritarian streak; to a donor with lots of money and a political agenda; to a department dominated by a rigid party line; to faculty members quick to impute ignoble motives to those who disagree with them; to well-intentioned administrators eager to enforce the latest social orthodoxy. The real constraints on the freedom of inquiry are for the most part unofficial and informal, not institutional.

In this connection, it is important to remember that boundaries can function in two ways: as limitations and as protection. A fence may keep me inside; but it also keeps intruders outside. An institution of higher learning with explicitly formulated religious boundaries on belief must attend to both of these senses. It must preserve its evolving identity through the care and repair of those tenants by which it defines its boundaries; but it must also hold to these boundaries as buffers against social and cultural pressures on the inquiry it seeks to foster. It must work to guarantee that positions formally consistent with those boundaries, and taken in good scholarly conscience, are not marginalized by political means; that the proponents of such positions are not bullied by the mob. The creeds may function as a tether, but they must also serve as a barricade.

The creedal requirements of a church-related institution of higher learning, then, can be seen as an overt attempt to specify the “band” of true tolerance in the domain of belief with reference to its specific identity and mission. The boundaries at either side of this band should establish a well-defined space for theoretical adventure, intellectual encounter, mental experimentation, and the continuous testing of belief. Such work of the mind must be shielded from the coercive tactics of the intolerant, both inside and outside the academy. “To enhance the creativity of a community,” Marsden writes at the conclusion of his study, “academics should be as free as possible within the framework of their other higher commitments to explore and communicate even unpopular and unconventional ideas. A presumption of freedom within limits is an immensely valuable way of defining academic life.”(Marsden, 434) Having established the boundaries of inquiry, the religiously identified academy must constantly struggle to secure a culture of trust and openness within those boundaries, where difference of opinion is not only tolerated but fostered, so that the truth not revealed may be found, and, if found, rightly held.

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