

Different To Make A Difference

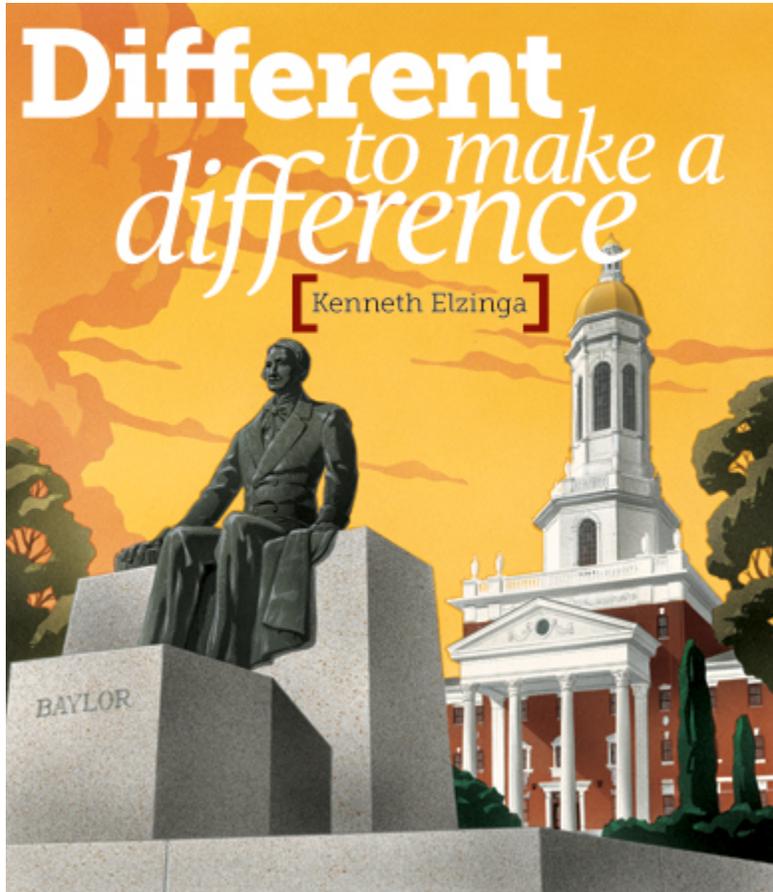


Illustration by Roger Beerworth

At Baylor, we're fortunate to have a wide variety of notable, informative speakers visit campus each semester. In the past year alone, Baylor played host to a Nobel Prize Laureate in Physics and two Pulitzer Prize winners in addition to a multitude of business leaders and academic experts. While it is not feasible to run transcripts of all of these outstanding speakers, one speech in particular, given this fall as part of the Presidential Symposium Series, seemed so timely that we wanted to share it with all our readers. Reprinted here is the speech by University of Virginia professor Kenneth Elzinga on the distinction between Christian higher education and Christians in higher education, specifically focusing on the unique and vital role Baylor University plays in the area of higher education.

It's an honor for me to speak at Baylor University in conjunction with Ken Starr's assuming the presidency of this institution, and it's a privilege for me to speak about a topic that goes right to the heart of this institution's

future as a university with a Christian identity. I want to distinguish "Christian higher education" from "Christians in higher education."

Let me begin, if I may, on an autobiographical note. I joined the faculty of the University of Virginia in the fall of 1967 as a freshly minted Ph.D. (I'll let you do the arithmetic if you want to estimate how old that makes me.) For all of my career, except for two semesters, I've been a faculty member at secular schools. The University of Virginia is often called "Mr. Jefferson's university," because Thomas Jefferson designed and conceived the school. The institution is relentlessly secular, as Mr. Jefferson would have wanted. Thomas Jefferson, after all, is the founding father most identified with the constitutional doctrine of a separation between church and state. But when parents ask me to speak to their high school-age children about attending the University of Virginia, if in the course of this conversation I learn that the children are followers of Jesus, I always ask them if they're considering a Christian school as well. And if not, I ask why, and we have a conversation about the costs and the benefits -- remember, I'm an economist -- of Christian versus secular schools. So I'm a friend of Christian higher education, even though my calling as a matter of vocation has been to a secular school. And that's the personal background I bring to the question, "What's the difference between Christians in higher education and Christian higher education?"

Let me begin with taxonomy. At secular schools, Christians in higher education can be placed in two different bins or categories. I'm not happy with the terms, but I'll call one group the "privatizers" and the other the "evangelicals."

Privatizers in higher education are dualists. Another term for them might be "two-spheres" Christians.

Privatizers or two-spheres Christians view their faith as disconnected from their work as professors. They may be involved in a local church, often heavily involved, but these professors, the privatizers, are not identified at their schools as Christians. This aspect of their identity may never be known by students or colleagues. Not that their faith is a deep, dark secret; they simply consider this data point about themselves as irrelevant to their life in the academy.

They are identified as professors of chemistry or accounting or German literature. Their Christian faith is private and apart from their jobs. These professors live in two worlds, not simultaneously but sequentially. One is secular, their campus, and one is sacred, their church. Now, let me say as an aside, from my observation, some Christian faculty at Christian colleges and universities live like privatizers as well.

The second kind of Christian professor in secular higher education I'll call the "evangelical." Now, the term "evangelical" is a portmanteau expression, and it requires some unpacking. I do not mean it simply as a label; by "evangelical," I mean to include all those -- Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant -- who subscribe warmly to the biblical and theological tenets of the Christian church, those cardinal beliefs and affirmations which have been reiterated in the confessions and creedal affirmations of Christian churches.

The professors, researchers and scholars in higher education I have labeled the "evangelicals" believe that the quest for truth begins and ends with Jesus. Their work involves teaching and research in their disciplines, but their calling entails extending the reign of Jesus into all realms. The evangelicals might resonate with the words of the Dutch reformer Abraham Kuyper: "There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, 'This is mine. This belongs to me.'"

They are professors who, in accord with 1 Peter 3:15, are always ready to give a defense of the hope that is within them. But they do so, as the Apostle Peter also makes clear, with gentleness and reverence. So you will not find these professors praying before class. You will not find them proclaiming the gospel in the classroom. You will not find them teaching their courses from a Christian perspective. While they are Christians in higher education, their institutional environment is not one of Christian higher education. Their lectures will not begin with a prayer; they will not end with an altar call.

Indeed, evangelicals at secular schools must be scrupulously fair and impartial with their students who are not followers of Jesus, treating the academic endeavors of these students the same way they would students who share their Christian convictions.

So evangelical professors may be quite visible as Christians at their secular colleges and universities, but they operate under a constraint. And that constraint is that fundamentally, they've been hired by their institutions to teach and do research in a particular discipline or subject matter, not to evangelize or engage in gospel proclamation.

To the extent that they are open about their Christian faith, the evangelicals do so in the same way that professors who are enthused about activities like sailing or cooking often share with students something about

their extracurricular passions and interests. So a professor who is passionate about sailing can make that known to her students, and her students may in turn find that interesting. Her students may even become interested in sailing. But all of her students understand that an interest or disinterest in sailing has nothing to do with the treatment the student receives in the classroom or laboratory.

Students of an evangelical professor in higher education understand that their grade is not a function of their own religious beliefs or lack thereof. Robert Benchley once observed that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who divide the world into two kinds of people, and those who don't. And so for the purposes of this talk, I'm in the first group. And in my reductionist bimodal distribution, one Christian professor sees his faith as largely irrelevant to his job; the other sees her job as a calling under the lordship of Jesus.

No doubt there are Christian faculty who manage to straddle the bimodal distribution. But my reductionism is useful for where I'm going next. Because, next, I want to turn to Christian higher education. What should it look like? To contextualize the question, what should Baylor University be like compared to an institution such as the University of Virginia? How should the two schools differ? What's the difference between my being a Christian in higher education and a school like Baylor University actually doing, or producing, or being higher education?

Here's my understanding of Christian higher education. Christian higher education does not start with Christian students. Now that surprises some of my colleagues at the University of Virginia. And some Christian colleges and universities have a Christian litmus test for the enrolling of students. I think that's a distraction. If prospective students who are academically qualified want to be part of Christian higher education, they should be welcome.

If the Christian faith is defensible, if the Christian faith is compelling, if the Christian faith is true, non-Christian students should be welcome to live and learn in the environment of Christian higher education and test the faith. Just as Jesus did not throw out Doubting Thomas, Christian higher education should be an environment that welcomes Doubting Thomases as students.

But Christian higher education, to merit that designation and imprimatur, should be dominated by a faculty who are followers of Jesus. By that, I mean the majority of faculty at an institution of Christian higher education should be Christians. The designation or description makes no sense if that is not the case. It is not my job -- it might be President Starr's -- to determine precisely what constitutes a majority. And it is not my job -- it might be President Starr's -- to determine the taxonomy of the term "Christian."

But I'm going to suggest a minimal hurdle or benchmark that I first heard from David Bast: faculty members who can agree to the Nicene Creed without crossing their fingers behind their back. Now I realize this benchmark may not square with the Baptist motto, "No creed but the Bible." And my point here is not to spotlight the Nicene Creed, but rather to make a point about the relevance and importance of some defining taxonomy.

Regarding Christian higher education, R.R. Reno recently wrote, "Not every professor and graduate student must be a Christian. Not all scholarship has to crackle with the ardor of faith. Committed Jewish or Muslim or Hindu scholars can contribute to a spirit of faithful inquiry at a Christian school. In fact, their witness in our contemporary academic culture of antinomianism and unbelief can be far more powerful than the example of a Christian scholar who bows to the latest academic fashions."

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My point is that students are transients. They come and go. Christian higher education is defined by a core of faculty who believe that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, that every thought is to be made captive to him, and they, the faculty, are not ashamed of the gospel.

My undergraduate school was begun by Baptists many years ago. And I have no doubt that the founders of this college were committed Christians who had a vision for a school that would embody Christian higher education. But over the years, the influence of Christianity waned at this school as it has in so many colleges and universities in the United States. When I was an undergraduate, I remember the college hired its first avowed atheist on the faculty, and this was announced with a measure of pride, as if the institution had come

of age. I look back upon that now as the time when "Ichabod (the Spirit has departed)" might have been written across the campus gates.

Now, for those who would object that requiring a faculty that is predominantly Christian will suppress otherwise unfettered academic freedom of inquiry and the pursuit of truth, I would respond in two ways. The first is the chronicle of how secular institutions have suppressed unfettered academic freedom as well, and the second is with a rhetorical question: If Christian higher education is not made so by Christian educators, what is the alternative paradigm that merits the label?

So Christian higher education starts with Christian faculty. Christian higher education also will have rules and precepts for living in Christian community, but the rules -- hear me on this -- are derivative of Christian higher education; they're not the foundation. Years ago, T.S. Eliot put the matter this way: "The purpose of Christian higher education would not be merely to make men and women pious Christians. A Christian education must primarily teach people to be able to think in Christian categories."

On this point, I have a different view than many parents as to why their children should be at schools like Baylor University. I know parents -- I talk to them all the time -- who want their children to go to a school with Christian roots and a continuing Christian identity because they think their children are less likely to get involved in drugs, less likely to get AIDS, less likely to fall in love with a non-Christian, less likely to -- and it's a long list. The list goes right down to less likely to end up wearing a ring in their nose or having a tattoo on their neck.

Now, I don't make light of these parental concerns. But my concept of Christian higher education travels in a very different direction from that of the rules of student conduct. I happen not to think that Christian education should be safe. I think Christian higher education should have an edge to it, just as it was dangerous to hang around with Jesus and even riskier to follow him.

Christian higher education should be defined by differences in teaching, differences in credentialing and differences in mentoring. The faculty is pivotal in each of these. Let me say as an aside, if I had time for another talk, I would discuss how Christian higher education might cause differences in curriculum, tuition and even the campus bookstore.

And I mention all these because the difference between Christians in higher education and Christian higher education is not minor or cosmetic. Christian higher education should be radically different. Now let me allocate five minutes on teaching, five minutes on credentialing, five minutes on mentoring, and then I'll conclude.

Teaching: It probably goes without saying that when a physicist at Baylor University teaches Bernoulli's Theorem, it's not taught differently from the way it would be at UVA. When I teach the economic principle of demand elasticity at UVA, I'm confident that the very identical formula is taught by professors here at Baylor. Ricardo's Principle of Comparative Advantage shows the benefits of free trade when taught in Charlottesville as in Waco. But when I teach the economic theory of income distribution at the University of Virginia, which I will start next week in the classroom, it is not fair game for me to ask, "What might the biblical principle of gleaning, leaving some extra grain in the fields for the poor, teach about income distribution in an industrialized society?" You can have that kind of conversation in Christian higher education. It should not be considered out of bounds to think of biblical perspectives of this sort, even if Christians in higher education who are at secular schools cannot go there. This is called integration, integrating the Christian faith with one's discipline. It's not easy to do, and it will involve different shapes and forms and different disciplines to take the Bible's great themes of creation and fall and redemption and weave them into classroom discourse.

To my mind, this is a primary distinctive between Christian higher education and Christians in higher education. The classrooms and laboratories and seminar rooms of Christian higher education are places where faculty and students are free to explore topics that may be off limits to Christian faculty at secular universities. Or, more likely to be the case, such themes are simply irrelevant to the academic discourse.

If the faculty members in Christian higher education simply believe that their job is to teach what they learned in graduate school and go home and be good church members, then integration won't take place, and the school will produce a generation of students, many of whom will come to believe there's a gap, if not a chasm, between the secular and the sacred.

Joel Carpenter has written that every Christian school needs some faculty who focus on questions of faith and knowledge and a Christian worldview. But Carpenter goes on to add that in Christian higher education, every professor must in some sense be a lay theologian.

An article by Baylor professor Perry Glanzer on redemptive moral development in higher education is the best paper I know on the subject. I find it difficult to improve upon his proposal. Let me read it: "I believe Christian colleges such as my own should rename their religion departments as theology departments in order to highlight the fact that we seek to help students become worshipping theologians, versed in the narratives, affections and practices of the church, and not merely critical thinkers about religion. General education courses pertaining to Bible or theology could also use this reorienting. Beyond theology, a Christian liberal education should both deepen our understanding of Christian practices and help us think critically about them."

Now, let me turn to credentialing. The business world emphasizes credentials. The professions of law and medicine emphasize credentials. But higher education really emphasizes credentials. We put them before our names, after our names. We calibrate and quantify performance. We rank people all the time. We look up to and we look down on people according to performance-based credentials or titles.

For years, I wrote a personal letter of congratulations to every student of mine who got an A-plus. I was proud of them, and they made me look good, too. I still do this, but now I write a letter to every student who fails my classes. Last fall, I wrote 30 of these letters.

I suspect Jesus would have thought first to write the F students. Christian higher education would, I hope, recognize before I did that the A-plus students already get lots of strokes. It took me about 20 years into my career to catch on to writing the young men and women who failed my class and whom perhaps I had failed as their teacher.

Deemphasizing credentials is a mark of Christian higher education. I'm much taken by the Apostle Paul's example here. How does Paul generally state his credentials? Right at the front of his epistles. Read the first verse of Romans: "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus." Philippians 1:1: "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus." Titus 1:1: "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ."

In most of higher education, "a servant" is not much of a credential. It should be in Christian higher education. I consider credentialing one of the most important areas of distinction between Christian higher education and secular schools.

Let me be as clear here as I know how: As a fan of Baylor University, I'm pleased to learn when her students get into Ivy League schools to do graduate work. But because what Baylor University is about is Christian higher education, I'm also pleased to learn when Baylor students who were estranged from their families have been reconciled as a consequence of being in this academic community. And that some Baylor students who came to Waco shackled by materialism are free of these bonds when they leave. And that some Baylor students who are chronically dishonest upon their arrival now let their yea be yea and their nay be nay. And that some Baylor students who were once snobs are now marked by humility because of being a part of this academic community. And that some Baylor students who once believed that the world is really nothing more than a random collocation of atoms in a purposeless universe now realize that they're made in God's image and that the whole world is full of God's glory.

Baylor University can place an advertisement in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* heralding the number of its students who go to do graduate work in the Ivy League. That's easy to do. But somehow Baylor also needs to recognize and acknowledge to its constituents that the very best students here are the sanctified ones, the broken ones whom God can use.

Precisely how Christian higher education can encourage and commend sanctification without it somehow devolving into a line item on a student's resume will be an unending challenge. Professors play a role here. Students in Christian higher education need to know that the faculty value the character and moral compass of their students, that professors admire godliness, that the faculty's deepest satisfaction as professors comes from seeing students becoming what God wants them to be: people for whom Jesus is preeminent. Now let me talk about mentoring, or if you prefer the term, discipling. I would expect Christian higher education to be characterized by professors who mentor students; not just teach them chemistry and accounting, not just teach them biology and Spanish, but model out for them how to walk with Jesus. Not because these faculty members have mastered how to do this, but simply because they've been pilgrims longer, because they have more experience with the consequences of sin and redemption.

I'll be very candid here. I have been surprised in my travels at how few faculty members in Christian higher education mentor or disciple students. And when I've asked why, the answer I sometimes hear is, "Well, that's for the dean of the chapel to do," or, "That's the job of the dean of students office."

Now, I'm an economist. I understand that answer. It is right out of Adam Smith. It appeals to what Adam Smith called specialization and division of labor. But while I understand the answer, I can restrain my enthusiasm for it, because to me it means that Christian higher education has professors who are not investing in the lives of their students beyond teaching them chemistry and accounting and biology and Spanish.

You can learn chemistry and accounting and biology and Spanish anywhere, and often at less cost than in Christian higher education. Many institutions of higher education in the United States that do a pretty good job at inserting faculty into classroom and laboratory settings for teaching purposes struggle to use the very same faculty to advise students outside the classroom and laboratory.

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The Chronicle of Higher Education recently ran an article by Mark Montgomery, who teaches at Grinnell College, entitled "Confessions of a Bad Academic Advisor." Most faculty members I know can relate to that article. It can be difficult and awkward, whether the professor is at a secular school or Christian school, to advise a first-year student as to exactly which level of calculus or Spanish class is optimal, much less to advise the student whether they ought to pursue a career in teaching or healthcare rather than commerce or state government.

But Christian higher education exists because there once was a Galilean who made disciples, and his disciples called him "rabbi," or teacher. Therein lies the principle by which teachers today are to invite -- not coerce, but invite -- students to be their disciples. That is, to mentor them. Jesus taught his followers the law and the prophets, but he also lived among them. And he even washed their feet.

I have wondered over and over again what the Lord's illustration of foot washing means to the professoriate of the 21st century. I once tried to refill the water glass of an international student who was a dinner guest at my home. "No, no," he said, "You're the professor. I cannot let you serve me. In my country, it's the other way around."

And my initial thought was, "That sounds like a nice place to be a professor." But as a Christian professor, I am asked to think what it means to be a foot washer. Many of my students would not want their feet washed, and many do not want to be disciplined. But in Christian higher education, there should be students who learn more than the material in the textbook and the lecture because they're at an institution that values -- that is, it devotes resources to -- the making and forming of disciples.

At the risk of sounding obsequious, let me mention that Baylor gets a lot of things right in modeling Christian higher education. Christian professors at secular schools -- I would be in this category -- would look with envy, sanctified envy I would hope, at Baylor's sponsorship of conferences like "The King James Bible and the World It Made" that assemble scholars like Philip Jenkins and Alister McGrath and Mark Noll and Lamin Sanneh and N.T. Wright under one roof.

I would be thrilled if something like that happened at my university, but I don't hold my breath. Or Baylor's symposium on "Sacred Text, Holy Images," with exhibitions of Chagall, Rouault and Fujimura. Baylor University's Institute for Studies of Religion is internationally known, and in my own field of economics, some of the premier conferences that link the "dismal science" with the Christian faith have been on this campus.

In short, there is a great foundation already established at this institution. And if I may take a certain liberty with the words of the Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians, he commended Christians in Thessalonica for their sanctification. But then he wrote, "We urge and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more." And soon thereafter after commending them for their brotherly love, Paul writes, "We urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more."

So to put Paul's words in an academic context as Baylor University seeks to fulfill its mission of offering Christian higher education, in the midst of its current track record, may the school's trajectory be one of "more and more."

When Jesus claims to be the way, the truth and the life, he honors truth. Christian higher education honors the pursuit of truth in the natural sciences, the social sciences, the humanities, the applied sciences, the professions and the arts. The pursuit of Christian higher education elevates students and professors as well by

giving them the lofty status of being in God's image.

Secular universities can tell their students nothing more than that they're talented, they're the best and the brightest. President Starr has explained his understanding of the pursuit of truth with the expression "discovery of new knowledge." Mr. Jefferson, the founder of the university, would agree with that. But President Starr does not stop there.

In the most recent issue of *First Things*, he wrote: "One of Baylor's core convictions is to 'facilitate the discovery of new knowledge to the glory of God and the betterment of humanity.' Baylor is a place where at our best, we develop the manifold gifts of body, mind and spirit, and by so doing, seek to glorify the creator whose handiwork we are and whose creation we study and celebrate."

Mr. Jefferson could not have put it that way. My own theological convictions have been influenced heavily by the Protestant Reformation, and consequently, I have been struck by how my aspirations for Baylor University under President Starr's leadership line up with what Rev. John Jenkins said in his inaugural address as the new president of Notre Dame.

These are Jenkins's words; listen to them carefully: "Notre Dame is different. Combining religious faith and academic excellence is not widely emulated or even admired among the opinion makers in higher education. Yet in this age especially, we at Notre Dame must have the courage to be who we are. If we are afraid to be different from the world, how can we make a difference in the world?"

Now let me swap just a couple words and geographically transfer what President Jenkins said from Indiana to Texas, from Hoosier Country to the Lone Star State. "Baylor University is different. Combining religious faith and academic excellence is not widely emulated or even admired among the opinion makers in higher education. Yet in this age especially, we at Baylor University must have the courage to be who we are. If we are afraid to be different from the world, how can we make a difference in the world?"

The opening line of C.S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is, "There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it." Now, isn't that a wonderful opening line? "There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it." That opening line, with the name Eustace Clarence Scrubb, doesn't match Melville's opening line, "Call me Ishmael," in *Moby Dick*, but it comes close.

And of this boy, Lewis wrote, "Although Eustace didn't care much about any subject for its own sake, he cared a great deal about grades." Secular schools have a difficult time explaining why students should care about a subject for its own sake apart from grades. Christian higher education can explain that. Thank God quite literally for that. From an economist's perspective, Christian higher education also expands the choice set of higher education.

Baylor University makes for a more diverse population of educational inputs and outputs. I think even students at schools of Christian higher education who are not themselves followers of Jesus ought to support the Christian distinctives of their schools, if only because of the valuable diversity schools like Baylor bring to higher education.

This diversity reminds me of Benjamin Franklin's remark at the close of the Constitutional Convention in 1787. Franklin said, "We've given you a republic, if you can keep it." One hundred and sixty five years ago, the founders of Baylor University in effect said, "We've given you an institution of Christian higher education, if you can keep it."

One hundred and sixty five years later, Baylor University's home page describes the school as a Christian community of faith. President Starr and the faculty, you have been given an institute of Christian higher education. May you continue to keep it until the Lord Jesus returns.
