

Preface.

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Source: *Pacific Journal* 1 (2006): 1-2.

Publisher: Fresno Pacific University.

Stable URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/11418/362>

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Preface

D. Merrill Ewert

The *Fresno Pacific Idea* has framed intellectual inquiry at this university since its inception as a four-year institution. The *Idea* calls the university to be Christian in its world view, collaborative in its practice, and transformative in its orientation.

This means, first of all, that students must be challenged to think Christianly about the world—about the nature of knowledge, the process of scholarship, and the meaning of truth. Christian scholarship must be grounded in an understanding of God as creator of the universe, affirming the authority of Scripture over matters of faith and life, and acknowledging the unity of body and spirit, mind and matter. It will call people to a life of discipleship, holiness, witness, and service as well as learning and knowing. It will integrate faith and learning, as Arthur Holmes so eloquently argues in his classic book, *The Idea of a Christian College*. Students will sharpen their skills of observation as they look at the world around them, developing the ability to think critically under the careful supervision of their faculty mentors.

Since Plato and Aristotle, we have understood that learning happens best through dialogue, challenge, and debate. John Dewey taught us that reflective thinking is the key to human development. More recently, the constructivists have clearly demonstrated that much of our knowledge is socially constructed. Without community, knowledge becomes idiosyncratic; ideas are untested and people become narrow-minded and dogmatic. That provides the argument for collaborative scholarship and peer review. In his highly acclaimed book, *The Role of the American University: The Creation of the Future*, Cornell University President Emeritus Frank Rhodes calls the loss of community within the academy, catastrophic. This loss, Rhodes says:

“...undermines the very foundation on which the universities were established; the conviction that the pursuit of knowledge is best undertaken by scholars, living and working, not in isolation, but in the yeasty and challenging atmosphere of community.”

Fresno Pacific’s commitment to community also calls us to marshal our intellectual resources and disciplinary skills in ways that not only examine the problems and issues facing our society, but put our scholarship to work on behalf of humankind. This is more than an academic opportunity; it is a moral imperative for the Christian university.

The *Fresno Pacific Idea* also calls us to be prophetic, speaking out in conscience—speaking to and critiquing contemporary culture and practice. We invite our community and church to use the tools of our academic disciplines to help find answers to some of the most vexing and difficult issues facing our society. Fresno Pacific University can help by building a culture of scholarship in the Church.

The Church and society itself are plagued by growing anti-intellectualism. Wheaton College historian Mark Noll, in his thoughtful book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, diagnoses the problem. Evangelical Christians, he suggests, have oversimplified issues, substituting inspiration and zeal for analysis and reflection. The scandal of the Evangelical mind, he argues, is that there *is* no evangelical mind. Noll calls for Christians to build a culture of scholarship that engages faculty members and their students in the search for truth.

We need a culture of inquiry that is dissatisfied; that is motivated not by the fear of failure but by the joy of discovery. As Christian scholars, we can contribute to the development of our disciplines while also helping the Church and society answer the tough questions. We have the enormous privilege of working in higher education. Anthony Diekema, former president of Calvin College, in his book, *Academic Freedom: Christian Scholarship*, declared: “Life in the academy was originally intended to be a . . . noble covenant, a mutually beneficial partnership with society . . .”

This monograph series contributes to that partnership by engaging Fresno Pacific University faculty in sharing their scholarship about issues that matter to the Church and society.