

January 30, 2013

I found God at Columbia

BY DENNIS PRAGER

http://www.jewishjournal.com/dennis_prager/article/i_found_god_at_columbia/

Not many people today can say that they found God or religion at college or graduate school. Most universities, after all, are thoroughly secular institutions that either ignore or disparage belief in God.

Yet, one day, when I was a graduate student in international affairs at Columbia University, I had an epiphany.

But first some background.

Beginning in my first semester at Columbia, I was preoccupied with this question: Why did so many learned and intelligent professors believe so many foolish things? Why did so many people at my university believe nonsense such as Marxism? I was a fellow at the Russian Institute, where I specialized in Soviet affairs and Marxism, and so I encountered professor after professor and student after student who truly believed in some variation on Marxism.

Why did so many professors believe and teach the similarly foolish notion that men and women are basically the same? At college, it was a given that the differing conduct of boys and girls and of men and women is solely a result of different — sexist — upbringings. The feminist idea that girls would be just as happy to play with trucks as with dolls and tea sets, and boys would be just as happy to play with dolls and tea sets as with trucks and toy guns, was almost universally believed and taught by secular academic intellectuals.

For example, the Boston Globe reported in 2005 that Larry Summers, when he was president of Harvard University, told an audience that “in an effort at gender-neutral parenting,” he had given one of his daughters, when she was a child, trucks instead of dolls.

To his credit, Summers did not stop there. “She treated them almost like dolls,” he concluded, “naming one of them ‘daddy truck,’ and one ‘baby truck.’ ”

So, the question remains: how could first-class minds such as Larry Summers and so many other professors really believe that girls are as happy to play with trucks as with dolls?

And why were so many professors morally confused about the clearest moral division of the day — responsibility for the Cold War? Specifically, how could people so learned in contemporary history morally equate the Soviet Union and the United States, and regard America as responsible for the Cold War? And today, how could so many in academia regard Israel as the Middle East’s villain?

Then came my epiphany. I remember it clearly. Walking through the Columbia campus, I received an answer to these questions seemingly out of nowhere. A biblical verse — one that I had recited every day in yeshiva, beginning in kindergarten — entered my mind: “Wisdom begins with awe of God” (Psalm 111 and elsewhere).

The verse meant almost nothing to me as a child — both because I recited it in the original Hebrew, which at the time I barely understood, and because the concept was way beyond a child’s ability to comprehend. But 15 years later, a verse I had rarely thought about solved the riddle of why nonsense and moral confusion dominate the liberal arts in almost all Western universities. And it set me on a philosophical course from which I have not wavered.

I realized that, of course, there are individuals who are secular and wise and individuals who are religious and



Dennis Prager

foolish. But it could not be a coincidence that the most morally confused of society's mainstream institutions and the one possessing the least wisdom — the university — was also society's most secular institution.

The Psalmist was right — no God, no wisdom.

Most people come to believe in God through the front door. They come to faith through a mystical experience, or an intellectual argument, or because they have an innately religious soul. Something leads them to believe in God.

But since that day at Columbia, I have regularly renewed my belief in God through the back door. I see the moral and intellectual confusion that godless ideas produce, and my faith is strengthened. The consequences of secularism on most of its adherents — belief in foolish ideas; good and evil inverted; beauty reviled and the obscene and ugly venerated; and, most of all, an absence of wisdom — have been at least as powerful a force for faith in my life as religion.

If our universities produced wise and morally courageous men and women, if they taught curricula with moral clarity and wisdom, there is no question that my religious faith would be challenged. I would look at the temple of secularism, the university, and see so much goodness and wisdom that I would have to wonder just how important God and religion were.

But, as the English writer and philosopher G.K. Chesterton put it about 110 years ago, "When people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing — they believe in anything."

Dennis Prager is a nationally syndicated radio talk show host (AM 970 in Los Angeles) and founder of PragerUniversity.com. His latest book is the New York Times best-seller "Still the Best Hope: Why the World Needs American Values to Triumph" (HarperCollins, 2012).

© Copyright 2013 Tribe Media Corp.

All rights reserved. JewishJournal.com is hosted by [Nexcess.net](#). Homepage design by [Koret Communications](#).

Widgets by [Mijits](#). Site construction by [Hop Studios](#).