



## The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship

By George M. Marsden

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At the end of his 1994 book, *The Soul of the American University*, George Marsden advanced a modest proposal for an enhanced role for religious faith in today's scholarship. This "unscientific postscript" helped spark a heated debate that spilled out of the pages of academic journals and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* into mainstream media such as *The New York Times*, and marked Marsden as one of the leading participants in the debates concerning religion and public life. Marsden now gives his proposal a fuller treatment in *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, a thoughtful and thought-provoking book on the relationship of religious faith and intellectual scholarship.

More than a response to Marsden's critics, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* takes the next step towards demonstrating what the ancient relationship of faith and learning might mean for the academy today. Marsden argues forcefully that mainstream American higher education needs to be more open to explicit expressions of faith and to accept what faith means in an intellectual context. While other defining elements of a scholar's identity, such as race or gender, are routinely taken into consideration and welcomed as providing new perspectives, Marsden points out, the perspective of the believing Christian is dismissed as irrelevant or, worse, antithetical to the scholarly enterprise. Marsden begins by examining why Christian perspectives are not welcome in the academy. He rebuts the various arguments commonly given for excluding religious viewpoints, such as the argument that faith is insufficiently empirical for scholarly pursuits (although the idea of complete scientific objectivity is considered naive in most fields today), the fear that traditional Christianity will reassert its historical role as oppressor of divergent views, and the received dogma of the separation of church and state, which stretches far beyond the actual law in the popular imagination. Marsden insists that scholars have both a religious and an intellectual obligation not to leave their deeply held religious beliefs at the gate of the academy. Such beliefs, he contends, can make a significant difference in scholarship, in campus life, and in countless other ways. Perhaps most importantly, Christian scholars have both the responsibility and the intellectual ammunition to argue against some of the prevailing ideologies held uncritically by many in the academy, such as naturalistic reductionism or unthinking moral relativism.

Contemporary university culture is hollow at its core, Marsden writes. Not only does it lack a spiritual center, but it is without any real alternative. He argues that a religiously diverse culture will be an intellectually richer one, and it is time that scholars and institutions who take the intellectual dimensions of their faith seriously become active participants in the highest level of academic discourse.

Whether the reader agrees or disagrees with this conclusion, Marsden's thoughtful, well-argued book is necessary reading for all sides of the debate on religion's role in education and culture.

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## The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship By George M. Marsden Bibliography

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

*The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, by George Marsden, is a short, forceful argument by a leading religious historian that the secular academy can and should be more open to faith-based scholarship. Marsden brings his considerable knowledge of fundamentalist and evangelical history to bear on the questions that face Christian students and teachers in mainstream universities: Is it better to stay quiet about faith? What will colleagues think of professors who talk about their religious beliefs in class? What kinds of knowledge are best illuminated by religious reflection? Marsden's main goal is practical, and the best parts of this book give advice about how Christian academics can connect with and encourage one another. He also points readers toward the work of a few academics who, Marsden argues, do topnotch research that also brings glory to God. --*Michael Joseph Gross*

#### From Kirkus Reviews

A frank assertion that religious faith does indeed have a place in academia. Marsden (History/Notre Dame) is an influential, perceptive scholar of American religion. *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (1980), his landmark study, stands as the definitive intellectual history of conservative evangelicalism. He argues here that the academy has trivialized religious faith to the extent that scholars feel compelled to check their belief systems at the door. Marsden admits that he is entering new territory here: This book is not a work of history, but a plea for scholars of faith to take a bold initiative in connecting their beliefs to their disciplines. This clarifies and expands upon a similar suggestion made in his controversial 1994 book, *The Soul of the American University*. Scholars rejected many of that work's ideas, expressing the suspicion that, if ultraconservative Christians were permitted to do so, they would not merely incorporate faith into their disciplines but seize control of education, demand equal time for such dubious pursuits as "creation science," and stifle alternative religious viewpoints. Marsden insists that this is not what he had in mind and that his vision of "faith-informed scholarship" requires scholars to play by the rules of the academy, rules that include accepting diverse perspectives. If there is a flaw in this short volume, it is that Marsden spends more time answering his critics and defining what faith-informed scholarship is not than in delineating what it might have to offer. His vision is also specifically Christian. Marsden says that he hopes that scholars of other faiths will join his crusade and integrate their beliefs with their work, and he repeatedly asserts that his goal is not to return American education to an old-time Protestant hegemony. This book will prompt more heated debate about the role of religion in the academy. And despite Marsden's eloquence, the jury is still out on this divisive question. -- *Copyright ©1996, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

#### Review

"A frank assertion that religious faith does indeed have a place in academia."--*Kirkus Reviews*

"In a lucid, thoughtful book even his toughest critics will find compelling, Marsden outlines specific ways that a scholarship informed by faith can, within the accepted rules of academic discourse, contribute new insights to the most sharply debated issues of the day, such as how to assert moral claims and affirm pluralism without lapsing into relativism."--*Publisher Weekly*

"Marsden presents his 'outrageous idea' with such calm, persuasive power and fundamental decency that it is

hard to imagine any person of good will taking exception. He here reaffirms his status as one of our leading interpreters of religion and contemporary American culture."--Jean Bethke Elshtain, Professor of Social and Political Ethics, The University of Chicago, author of *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*."

"A masterly explanation and defense of Christian learning in the contemporary world, displaying the learning it advocates."--Nicholas Wolterstorff, Noah Porter Professor of Philosophical Theology, Yale University

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### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Deana Broom:**

Nowadays reading books be than want or need but also become a life style. This reading behavior give you lot of advantages. Advantages you got of course the knowledge your information inside the book that will improve your knowledge and information. The information you get based on what kind of guide you read, if you want attract knowledge just go with schooling books but if you want feel happy read one having theme for entertaining such as comic or novel. The particular *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* is kind of book which is giving the reader capricious experience.

#### **Nancy Lord:**

Spent a free time to be fun activity to complete! A lot of people spent their leisure time with their family, or their friends. Usually they performing activity like watching television, planning to beach, or picnic inside park. They actually doing ditto every week. Do you feel it? Do you need to something different to fill your current free time/ holiday? Can be reading a book could be option to fill your free time/ holiday. The first thing that you will ask may be what kinds of publication that you should read. If you want to consider look for book, may be the guide untitled *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* can be good book to read. May be it is usually best activity to you.

#### **Roberta Granger:**

*The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* can be one of your beginning books that are good idea. We all recommend that straight away because this reserve has good vocabulary that will increase your knowledge in vocab, easy to understand, bit entertaining but delivering the information. The author giving his/her effort that will put every word into delight arrangement in writing *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* nevertheless doesn't forget the main point, giving the reader the hottest and also based confirm resource data that maybe you can be among it. This great information may drawn you into fresh stage of crucial pondering.

**Annie Rose:**

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