

QUICK LINKS: [HOME](#) | [NEWS](#) | [OPINION](#) | [RIGHTPAGES](#) | [CHAT](#) | [WHAT'S NEW](#)

townhall.com

How I found God at Columbia

Dennis Prager ([back to web version](#)) |  [Send](#)

December 2, 2003

Very few people can say that they found God or religion at college or graduate school. The university, after all, is a radically secular institution that either ignores or disparages religious belief in God.

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

I remember it very clearly. Since entering graduate school, 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 even more 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 a result of different, i.e., sexist, upbringings. The feminist absurdity that girls do girl things because they are given dolls and tea sets, and boys do boy things because they are given trucks and toy guns, was actually believed in the mind-numbing world of academic intellectuals.

And why were so many professors morally confused? How could people so learned in contemporary history morally equate the Soviet Union and the United States, regard America as responsible for the Cold War, or regard Israel as the Middle East's villain?

One day, I received an answer to these questions. Seemingly out of nowhere, a biblical verse -- one that I had recited every day in kindergarten at the Jewish religious school I attended as a child -- entered my mind. It was a verse from Psalm 111: "Wisdom begins with fear of God."

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 mind to comprehend. But 15 years later, a verse I had rarely thought about answered my puzzle about my university and put me on a philosophical course from which I have never wavered.

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 what I call the front door of faith. Something leads them to believe in God. Since that day at Columbia, however, I regularly renew my faith through the back door -- I see the confusion and nihilism that godless ideas produce and my faith is restored. The consequences of secularism have been at least as powerful a force for faith in my life as religion.

If our universities produced wise men and women, curricula of moral clarity, and professors who loved liberty and truth, not to mention loved America -- 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 I look at the university and see truth deconstructed, beauty reviled, America loathed, good and evil inverted, elementary truths about life denied, and I realize that one very powerful argument for God is that society cannot function successfully without reference to Him.

So as much as I shudder almost every time I read of another academic taking an absurd position, I also feel my faith renewed.

Ironically, the worse the universities get, the greater their tribute to God.

©2003 Creators Syndicate, Inc.

[Contact Dennis Prager](#) | [Read Prager's biography](#)

townhall.com

QUICK LINKS: [HOME](#) | [NEWS](#) | [OPINION](#) | [RIGHTPAGES](#) | [CHAT](#) | [WHAT'S NEW](#)