

Freedom of religion, speech apply to every religion

Students should be allowed to freely express beliefs within guidelines.

It's always encouraging to see students so actively supporting their First Amendment rights, taking to heart their freedom of speech and freedom of religion to protest what they view as protest-worthy. Certainly

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freedom of speech and freedom of religion are rights, but it is unfortunate to see those advocates of "freedom" really advocating censorship.

Unfortunately as it is, that is the case with this "Quad-chalking" drama that is unfolding across the editorial pages of the *Old Gold and Black*. First off, I must say that I had nothing to do with the Quad-chalking incident, nor do I know anyone who did. I am a Christian, but am not associated with any Christian

campus organization. As a concerned member of the student body, I felt I must respond to last week's angry columns in an effort to spur some degree of reconciliation.

Should the students have done more research on appropriate methods of expression sanctioned by the university? Absolutely. Are they guilty of breaking university regulations? Yes. Should the same action be taken against them that has been taken against other groups who committed the same act in the past? Yes.

On these points I am in complete agreement with the columnists from last week's issue. Where I differ is in viewing the motivations for the group's actions and their right to those motivations. I do not believe that these students were seeking to offend, belittle or berate anyone else by chalking "God Loves You" on our main Quad.

What seems to have taken place here is simply a desire to express beliefs via a public forum, to acknowledge their faith and fulfill what they see as a biblical direction to share that faith with others. This was not a method to coerce anyone's conscience. It is not shameful that some Christians feel

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called or moved in this way.

What is shameful is the way that the columnists responded. In what way does a Christian's right to freedom of speech or freedom of religion go against any ideals held by our university community? The fact that people, myself included, disagree with some of their statements, particularly the "anti-intellectual" chalked messages, is merely a sign that the system is working.

Free speech! Freedom of religion! People being free to express their own views and be disagreed with! Hooray!

Students are free to ignore signs for religious groups, much the same way they are free to ignore any other signs. Students are free to attend religious meetings. Students are free to start their own group. Students are free not to care. Students are free to be offended. Students are free to be angered.

What students should not be free to do is censor and mock others' beliefs hiding behind the catch phrase of "freedom." And if they attempt to do so, then others are free to point it out.

The fact that the Christian community on our campus is the largest represented religion means that it has a special responsibility in promoting these freedoms, and these chalkers should have been more sensitive to that. But simply because not all students here are Christian doesn't mean it's acceptable to censor, ridicule and belittle these Christians, generalizing them into some sort of "oppressor" group.

We need to ask ourselves where all this anger from these offended students was coming from. The columns seemed at times to drift from the chalking incident and centered on personal religious conflicts and difficulties with

"conservative" Christians. It's fine that students have personal issues with religion, because frankly everyone has them, and no one has it all figured out.

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Is the religious atmosphere of our community a perfect one? No. There is a lot of work to be done in reconciling students of all beliefs to respect each other. But will we obtain a harmonious community through repression of potentially distasteful and unpopular interpretations? No, we will not. The challenge about believing in the importance of freedom of speech and freedom of religion is to support those freedoms for messages with which we personally disagree. Disagree with what the Quad chalkers were saying, but support their right to say it and believe it. (Through the correct university guidelines, of course.)

Column neglects additional, broader Christian theologies

Christians should be careful not to pigeon-hole beliefs to rigid 'traditional' thought.

I am a Christian. It has taken me 20 years to define what that means, and it is a definition that is challenged and develops every single day. Through my struggles to find a faith community and to articulate my own beliefs, I have learned that the word "Christian" means many different things in our society. In his column ("Faith lies behind Quad

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chalking," April 18), Derek Radney defended the chalking of the Quad as a witness to his faith. Though I do not share his perspective, I respect his faith nonetheless. My concern comes from Radney's attempts to define for the Wake Forest community what Christianity is. Radney wrote, "The basis of Christianity is that we as humans are all sinners, and the only way we can have a relationship with God is by accepting forgiveness given by the sacrifice of His son Jesus Christ, who died for our sins ... To be a Christian is to acknowledge Jesus as the way, the truth and the life and that no one comes to God except through Him." While this is one interpretation of Christianity and the relationship of God and creation, it certainly does not exhaust the breadth and variety of theological ideas found within the boundaries of Christianity.

I write for two purposes. First, I feel that Radney and others who would so narrowly draw a line of demarcation in the rich theological sand of Christianity deserve to hear the voice of those within the established Christian community who do not necessarily identify with their well-defined beliefs. Secondly, many of my friends, and I am sure many others on this campus, have heard Christianity defined this way all their lives. Radney's article, and the chalking incident it supports, continues to defend this view of God and humanity that fails to speak to the concerns and experience of many of God's people. To this audience I hope to convey a sense of nurturing openness and questioning that I have found in the religious community on campus.

What many people both within and outside the Christian community do not realize is that Christology, the search to understand the nature and work of Christ, is not a static process.

Throughout the history of Christianity, believers have debated what exactly they believe about Jesus. In fact, the "substitutionary" theory stating that Jesus died for us to forgive our debt of sin, which most people accept as doctrinal Christian belief, originated in the 12th century in the writings of Anselm of Canterbury. Though this notion has theological roots in the early church, it was one of many and did not truly receive official support until over a millennium after the death of Jesus.

My purpose is not to suggest that this idea is wrong, but merely incomplete, ignoring alternative images of Jesus, God and humanity within Christianity. Alternate examples include the belief that Christ's work lies not in his death, but in his life. Christ was a friend to the poor, the outcast and the people who culture and religion called dirty and separated from the rest of society. A close reading of the gospels, especially Luke, can reveal a Christ who proclaims the Kingdom of God not as some otherworldly salvation, but as a call to reform the world in which we live. This image of Jesus seeks to restore community and dignity to the image of God, not to drown us in guilt

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for making him die. Christ may be understood not as he who saves, but as he who can teach us how to save ourselves through wisdom and compassion. Even this is but one interpretation of many, and my goal is not to propose it as "the Truth," but to offer it as an example of the many voices that come out of the Christian tradition.

Additionally, what I think most offends people, causing some to view Christians as exclusive or intolerant, is the declaration taken from the Gospel of John that Christ is the only way or truth. While this declaration of exclusivity is definitely the loudest voice in Christianity, it certainly does not reflect a consensus by any stretch of the imagination.

Many lay Christians, as well as innumerable ministers and Christian theologians, have opened their hearts to the truth to be found in Buddhism, Judaism, Islam and other faith traditions. In fact, entering into truly open dialogue with these traditions can enrich our own. We should admit the possibility that others in the world might know things about life that we have not yet learned.

To my friends in the Christian community I offer simply that the issue of defining our faith is not a simple one. Again, I am not arguing that Radney's position is wrong. I am simply acknowledging that there are many voices within the Christian community itself, including ministers, scholars and lay persons, whose beliefs may differ from his definition.

If we are to remain a strong community, accepting and loving all our sisters and brothers with respect and compassion, we must be open to the varying ways in which we all experience the divine. Disagreement does not necessarily mean that someone is wrong. If we proclaim God to be the ultimate transcendent reality, then we must not limit the possibilities of spiritual expression and understanding too quickly.

I respect Radney's faith statements and appreciate the sense of love and dedication with which he presents his ideas. However, as someone who has struggled with the theology of mainstream Christianity, I know how frightening declarations like Radney's can be for those who feel ostracized by a seemingly exclusive and condemning faith community. However, I hope to assure you that his words and definitions do not reflect the singular nature of the Campus Ministry groups on campus.

My experience with the Revs. Tim Auman, Stewart Ellis and Jude DeAngelo has been affirming and encouraging, assuring me that I am not alone or wrong in my struggle to understand God, Christianity and life itself in a way that often differs from the ascribed path of "mainline Protestantism." The university's Religion department also has provided me with numerous role models of individuals with very committed faiths and rich spiritual lives who seek to continually question the "basic" elements of Christianity. At Wake Forest I have found many who are beginning to question aspects of their faith as well as many others who are fully committed to redefining Christianity in the world. To those who fearfully walk the line of faith and community, afraid of rejection because of certain beliefs or lifestyles, who question theories on salvation and human nature: You are not alone. Christianity at Wake Forest is much broader and more accepting than it has appeared in the last few weeks.

Response extreme, not chalking

A prospective student shares view of chalking incident.

I read Dustin Smith's column ("Religious freedom taken to extremes," April 18) online, and as a prospective student I must say that what strikes me as "extreme" is not the fact that Christian students chalked the sidewalk surrounding the Quad

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on April 14. What is extreme, however, is the manner by which Smith and several of his fellow columnists have reacted to the messages scribbled on the sidewalks by so-called religious fanatics. I would like to suggest that perhaps Smith, as someone who considers himself "very tolerant of other beliefs and opinions," is hypocritical.

To say, as Smith did in his article, that it is a "frightening proposition" when students who do not believe in evolution are allowed to be a part of the Wake Forest community is a direct contradiction of what supposedly is a part of his character. Being tolerant is being accepting of different viewpoints - yes, even the Christian viewpoint - but being intolerant is when someone like Smith implies that to be intellectual you must believe in evolution, and to be a Wake Forest student, you must be

Being tolerant is being accepting of different view points - yes, even the Christian viewpoint - but being intolerant is when someone like Smith implies that to be intellectual you must believe in evolution, and to be a Wake Forest student, you must be anything but Christian.

Smith said in his column that "these sidewalk scribbles were much more than beliefs and opinions, they were written for a reason: To directly offend many potential students with different beliefs and repel them from enrolling." To use a word that he seems to be fond of, I am "offended" that he is accusing these Christian students of chalking the sidewalks for a reason that he has yet to prove really was their reason.

According to student columnist Derek Radney ("Faith lies behind Quad chalking," April 18) their sole purpose "was to show prospective students that Christ is working in the lives of students at Wake Forest." Why would the students want to chalk the Quad to purposely offend others?

Has it occurred to Smith that perhaps the Christians feel offended at a lot of other events that take place on campus or that they feel just as much a minority as Muslim and Buddhist students? Is he aware, for example, that as reported in the *Old Gold and Black*, there was a group of students in

the 1960s who performed a much more mean-spirited act of burning crosses?

I understand that what he calls "a juvenile act of colorless intolerance and intellectual weakness" has stirred up quite an uproar among the student body. Apparently their "juvenile" way of expressing themselves not only made the non-believer pray for rain, but their act of "intellectual weakness" made the intellectuals feel "outnumbered" by the overwhelming amount of biblical messages scribbled on the sidewalk.

I am reminded of a Bible verse, 1 Corinthians 1:27, that says, "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world (e.g., chalk) to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty" (e.g. intellectualism or Darwin's widely-respected theory). Rather than quoting more verses from the Bible, because I realize that Smith has heard enough for one week, I will close by saying that perhaps it would be wise of him to ask the Christian students who did this exactly what their motives were. Perhaps it would be even wiser for him to seek their God for this answer.

While his fellow students may desire to shine the light of Christ on campus, according to both Christian theology and the theory of evolution, they are only human and will make mistakes. God, on the other hand, never makes mistakes, but loves those who do and says that if anyone seeks Him with His whole heart, he will find Him.

