

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Orthopraxy: not just believing, but doing the truth through service**By Douglas Kindschi***Director of the Kaufman Interfaith Institute, GVSU*

Last week was a special one for me personally, since Grand Valley State University dedicated its new Kindschi Hall of Science recognizing the 28 years I served as dean.

The guest speaker for the event was Dean Kamen, the inventor of the Segway and founder of the FIRST robotic competitions.

Kamen commented that, to really understand science, you have to do science.

The emphasis on laboratory learning and becoming involved in doing, brings understanding that goes way beyond studying facts from a book or hearing a lecture.

This is the motivation behind his FIRST competition, where 3,000 teams of high school stu-

dents work with engineers who mentor them as they build robots that compete against other teams.

Hearing him speak and reflecting on my own involvement with the Science Olympiad tournaments, which we sponsored when I was dean, reminds me, in my current interfaith role, of the distinction between orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

There is often much emphasis on "right belief" (orthodoxy) in religion and not so much on "right practice" (orthopraxy).

We often forget that our religious leaders and founders throughout history have stressed the practice of religion. The Ten Commandments tell what to do and what not to do, instead of

what to believe.

When Jesus was asked by the lawyer what was the greatest commandment, Jesus responded that he should love God and love his neighbor. (Matt. 22:35-40)

The focus was on action, not belief.

In a recent Daily Meditation from the Franciscan Richard Rohr, he refers to an analysis of the writings of St. Francis who "uses the word doing rather than understanding at a ratio of 175 times to 5.

Heart is used 42 times to 1 use of mind. Love is used 23 times as opposed to 12 uses of truth. Mercy is used 26 times while intellect is used only 1 time."

Rohr calls this "performative spirituality, which means things are only found to be true in the doing of them."

In the interfaith setting, we see this same emphasis on right

practice or orthopraxy. Judaism's understanding of mitzvah, or commandment, is central to Jewish practice.

In Islam, the basic creed is the Shahada, which means testimony and in its simplest form is "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God."

It is the first of the Five Pillars of Islam. The other four practices include: prayer (five times each day), alms-giving (a percentage of one's wealth given to the poor), fasting (from sunrise to sunset during the month of Ramadan), and the Hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca (if one is able-bodied and can financially afford it).

In the Eastern religions, the concept of "dharma" is found in Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism with somewhat different interpretations.

The key, however, is to pur-

sue the correct path in terms of duties, conduct and the "right way of living."

When we had our Year of Interfaith Understanding, attention was given to what the various religions believed.

We encouraged participants to share the thickness of their faith and not try to reduce or thin it out so that we could all agree.

In our Year of Interfaith Service, we have been looking at what values and practices we have in common.

We may not agree on our beliefs, but we can choose to act together in areas where our values are in common.

When it comes to helping those in need, or caring for the creation, or loving our neighbor, we can act together in ways of service.

Let this be our challenge.
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