

letters to the editor

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In his letter to the editor of March 12th, Mr. Donald Swanson made certain statements with regard to the Student Court's decision in the "Josh Case" which need elaboration and clarification.

Mr. Swanson is certainly correct in one respect: total separation between church and state is impossible, however desirable such a fact would be to many of us. This is clearly recognized in the Constitution itself in the First and Fourteenth Amendments. In addition, many Federal Court decisions attest to the fact as well.

The Constitution is very clear in the question of taxing the citizens of this country to support any religious group for the direct purpose of that group's evangelizing mission. It seems to me that this problem—and only this problem—was the one addressed in the Student Court's decision. To use a university building to provide Josh McDowell with a forum for his own brand of preaching and the use of the campus mails to spread the word of his coming was a clear violation of the constitutional rights of all students of this university and the citizens of this state.

I would like to address Mr. Swanson's more polemical statements, too. To assume that the "spirit" of the law with regard to religion and education was intended to apply only to the education of "immature and impressionable" children and not to those of us who are older and should know better is both a gross *non sequitur* and a perversion and distortion of the concepts "spirit of the law" and "letter of the law." To assume that only children and not adults need the protection of the Constitution and the laws is ingenious at best. It is also dangerous as well.

The Student Court's decision does not jeopardize the concept of the university as a "market place of ideas." Rather it enforces that important concept. But since Mr. Swanson likes to blur legal distinctions it should come as no surprise that he blurs logical ones as well.

There is a clear and evident distinction

between studying religions and religious ideas as objective phenomena and in extending the supporting arm of the state (the University in this instance) to evangelical dogmatizing and preaching. The study of religion has a long—if not exactly honorable—tradition in the humanities and no part of the Student Court's decision is likely to change that.

We all agree, I believe, that the absence of religious studies would leave a huge gap in the liberal arts curriculum at this university. But NU, or any secular university for that matter, is not some Hinky Dinky of the intellectual world where we wheel our mental marketbaskets filling them up with the goodies that only please our senses of smell, taste and sight, while neglecting the demands of intellectual nutrition.

In this respect religion and religious studies requires no special treatment or handling by scholars and students, for religion, too, must submit to the methods of rigorous science and logical inquiry derived from the natural and human sciences. This mind recognizes as valid only one universal, namely, rational thought itself.

But it is at this point—rational thought and logic—that Mr. Swanson and the minions of Josh McDowell find the weakest link in their rusty chain of arguments and where they are unwilling and unable to do battle.

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