

HIS VIEW: Restoring civility to Moscow without illusions

By Roy Alden Atwood

Friday, November 30, 2007

The ugly boycott of Christ Church-member businesses has shown once again that Moscow is not only a deeply divided community, but one that lacks basic civility. That needs to change.

I'm optimistic that it will, thanks to Tom Lamar and the election of a new City Council.

I have no illusions that the fundamental disagreements in our town will go away anytime soon. The issues of homosexuality, abortion, property rights, educational choice, and religious freedom are really too important to sweep under the rug. Pretending we can all just get along while ignoring our disagreements on these national hot-button issues won't magically make them go away.

Neither will the trash-talking and name calling we've endured the past few years. Accusing more than 1,000 of our fellow citizens of being racists, sexists, homophobes, or even the Taliban - when they are demonstrably nothing of the sort - says more about the inability of the name callers to make persuasive arguments than about the actual beliefs and actions of those they defame. Such smear campaigns do nothing more than cause collateral damage to our neighbors and our community's reputation.

Boycotting businesses just because the owners happen to attend Christ Church is, as Jim Fisher rightly put it in his Lewiston Tribune editorial (Nov. 15), "religious bigotry against people who attended the wrong church." It requires passing an ideological test to do business in town. It may grant that all people are equal, but some are more equal than others. It terminates civil discussion about others. Such a boycott reveals, according to Fisher, that religious "bigotry has grown into a cancer" in Moscow. I agree.

Yet I'm optimistic civility can make a comeback in Moscow, thanks to the recent example of re-elected City Council member Tom Lamar. When one Christ Church member hoisted a pre-election protest sign mocking the "Bigot Party" (meaning the MCA-endorsed candidates) and mentioning Lamar by name, Tom and his family were understandably upset. But Tom

did something truly remarkable. He didn't lash back with a volley of epithets. He didn't vent his spleen on Vision2020. He didn't unleash scorched-earth letters to the editor.

In the heat of the moment, Tom calmly walked down to the office of Christ Church Pastor Douglas Wilson to find out why one of his parishioners would raise such an accusatory sign in protest. Pastor Wilson welcomed him. They talked. They listened to each other. And they both came away better understanding their mutual concerns - all without inflammatory rhetoric or name-calling.

Tom handled that protest situation following basic Sunday school ethics. He defused a potentially dicey conflict with basic civility. He made sure he honestly understood what others meant, what they were actually trying to say, what they actually believed. He implicitly acknowledged that he might have misunderstood them or even been wrong himself. He wanted to be sure he got to the heart of the matter.

He didn't jump to conclusions. He recognized that most of the recent unpleasantness in Moscow has come from people being too quick to judge and too slow to check their facts. Tom was unwilling to think the worst of others simply because of where they went to church. Gladly, he was unwilling to engage in old fashioned prejudice.

Our community will no doubt remain sharply divided for many more years over the hot-button issues that lurk beneath the surface of Moscow's tensions. But using boycotts and bigoted power games to end discussion will only rip our community apart. Again, Fisher is right, "The time for people of conscience to speak up arrived some time ago in Moscow."

I commend Tom Lamar for showing us by example that people of conscience have a better way out of the Moscow quagmire, a way to restore civility to our community. I encourage all Moscow citizens, on all sides of our local disagreements, to follow Tom's example. If we do, I'm optimistic that Moscow can once again embrace civility, despite the differences in our deeply held beliefs.

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To Roy Atwood from Joe Campbell, Nov. 30

I'm sorry, Roy, but I take issue with this article.

Do you read Ed Iverson's columns? They are offensive. Do you read Dale Courtney's website? It is offensive. Have you looked at Doug Wilson's Blog and Mablog lately? It is offensive. Perhaps you don't see the offense but there is a continual series of offensive remarks directed toward gays, lesbians, feminists, liberals, progressives, hippies, etc. Just because you do not fit into these categories and these comments do not offend you does not mean that they are not offensive to others. If you want people to respect you in spite of their beliefs, you have to act in kind.

Dale Courtney has comments of mine, taken out of context, which suggest that I am in favor of abortion. That is a lie and I've told him and others, including you, but to no avail. If you google 'Joe Campbell' Dale's website is the first thing that shows up. I have folks writing me letters once a week asking me what's up. It is likely that my career has been harmed because of this misrepresentation.

I commend Tom for visiting Wilson. A while ago I visited you and it was after that visit that I realized that you could care less if Iverson, Courtney, and Wilson offended my friends or me. I have not visited you or anyone else from Christ Church since. Now you are asking others and me to care whether Christ Church businesses suffer boycott. I am sorry to break the news but civility is a two-way street.

Prior to the school levy election Dale Courtney paid for an anti-levy ad yet the ad was attributed to a dead man instead of himself. This is beyond all civil bounds.

During the election a member of Christ Church held up a sign calling three candidates 'bigots' simply because they noted a need for conditional use permits for boarding houses. (Something that one of the GMA candidates also recommended, by the way.) If I buy a house, I'd like to know if I'm moving in next to a boarding house yet without conditional use permits how on earth would I know this? Doug Wilson and others called them 'bigots' -- and you yourself, Roy, suggested in an open letter that the boarding house amendment was inspired by prejudice against Christ Church. Critics are bigots. This is approach is uncivil.

I agree that we all need to be civil I just wish that members of Christ Church, like yourself, would look in the mirror and see the need for more civil action on their part. Otherwise, I don't see that much will change. Certainly if someone from your church has the right to hold up a sign calling candidates 'bigots' just because they passed a needed ordinance that was financially unfavorable to members of Christ Church, other people have the right to boycott businesses owned by members of Christ Church. Should either be done? No. But I don't see why I should take much action is preventing the latter if you don't take any action in preventing the former. Civility is a two-way street.

If you'd like further evidence of the lack of civility from proponents of Christ Church, merely look at the ugly anonymous comments above and below. Civility is a two-way street.

Atwood responds to anonymous postings on Dec. 2

All, first, thanks for your comments. Second, I can't possibly respond to everyone here, but invite any of you who are honestly trying to heal the divisions in our community to contact me later or stop by sometime to talk.

Third, contrary to Wakeup's cheap shots (BTW, anonymous posts don't merit a response), we were busy last night (saw Amazing Grace--great flick) and celebrating St. Andrew's Day. Had a wonderul banquet tonight. Happy St. Andrew's Day (+1).

I am disappointed that my plea for civility has fallen on some pretty deaf and anonymous ears.

Dave R, thanks for your posts. I generally dislike the blog world and think it is a poor medium to carry on a clearheaded, civil conversation on complex issues. So I invite you to stop by sometime to follow up our exchange here. But let me give a very brief response to a couple of your points.

Re. your first one, as I wrote in a personal letter to the incumbent candidates right after the protest happened, the "bigot" sign was inappropriate (esp. re. Tom), but I understood Glasebrook's frustration. As I said in my column, I also understood why Tom might be upset, so I wasn't silent about the inappropriateness of the "bigot" sign.

But I'm not neutral on these issues, either, and don't pretend to be. NSA has been attacked by roughly the same group of folks for the past couple of years (Gier's attempt to block our accreditation, Huskey-Opyr-Lund's tax complaints, Nolan-Bauer's (et. al) zoning complaint, Huskey-Pall-Ament boarding house law changes, and now the boycott. These are not mere points of disagreement about views expressed, but deliberate, calculated actions (invoking the power of government) attempting to harm our livelihoods, pry into our homes, drive us out of our businesses and push us out of town. So I am not expecting people to be neutral in their opinions, just civil--and not bigoted in their actions.

On your third point, as I stated in my column, name calling is usually the result of frustration or intellectual laziness, and it's rarely accurate or civil. Name calling usually occurs when people demonize someone else they've either never really talked to or they come to a conversation with deep prejudices that cause them to distort or misinterpret what others are actually saying. And that can happen on all sides of a dispute, BTW. However, I believe there has been an organized smear campaign among a few in town to deliberately harm our reputations and to make it easier for others to demonize and dismiss us simply because of where we go to church.

Finally, on your last point about anonymous posts, I agree that they are wrong. If Christians (Christ Church members or others) violate basic charity and Matt. 18 ethics with an anonymous post, I believe they're doing something wicked. It's wrong, they should stop and repent. But on what basis do you think it's wrong? Seems to me that most of our critics on V2020 justified anonymous attacks when they were directed at Christ Church members for years because they don't see anything fundamentally wrong with it. And why do you assume it's Christ Church members going anonymous now? I seriously doubt it (and would be greatly disappointed if it were). Given the nastiness toward Christ Church members, few who are non-CC members but who disagree with the far left in our community are anxious to be lumped with CC members. I think non-CC members have more reasons to go anonymous than CC members--but they shouldn't. Without evidence of their identity, any conclusions about an anonymous sender's identity would seem to be based primarily on prejudice.

Obviously, lots more to discuss and debate, but thank you, Dave R, for the tone and straight up questions. Again, you and others have brought up many

more issues that I won't try to discuss in this venue. But I invite you for coffee to discuss things further with the hope of restoring some civility to Moscow.

Nick Gier responds on Dec. 2

Dear Roy,

I addressed you personally and I was hopeful for a reply. I guess your refusal to talk with me is still your position.

When I posted my response to you on Vision2020, I added the fact that on several occasions, I commended Logos and NSA students on their achievements.

Just as criticism of other evangelical preachers is never intended as a blanket condemnation of their congregations, my only wish for the good people of Christ Church is that they have honest leaders and move to churches that do have such leaders.

By the way, the more I learned about the Transnational Association for Christian Colleges and Schools, the more I realized that no one with sound academic objections could ever "block" accreditation from such an agency.

Eagerly waiting for your reply,

Nick

Joe Campbell on Dec. 2

Same here, Roy. So much for civility! You say that you won't respond to anonymous posts but only two people used their full names and you responded to neither!

what I dislike about your tactics is that you label fairminded criticisms from non-Christ Church folks as instances of religious persecution. NSA does not belong downtown, just as it did not belong in a residential area for its first location and just like it did not belong downtown in its second location. There were legitimate zoning complaints filed each time but they were ignored by NSA.

As for the Huskey-Opyr-Lund's tax complaints, didn't a judge rule that in at least one case they were right? Again, those were legitimate complaints. At least one involved the fact that a business was run out a building that had tax-exempt status.

Likewise with the Huskey-Pall-Ament boarding house amendment. Shouldn't I have a right to know whether or not the house that I own is next to a boarding house? Without the new law, how on earth would I know that?

Time and time again you take legitimate complaints against Christ Church affiliated establishments and publicly claim that the complaint is based on religious prejudice.

That is wrong and as a Christian I resent that kind of behavior. More to the point, it is not civil.

If you want civility, then the leaders of Christ Church must do better. In particular, you have to stop playing the 'bigot' card.

I'll let Nick talk about the specifics of the accreditation. Or one can simply check out his website and find out the facts for him or herself.

Dave R: If you do have coffee with Roy, let me know and I'll join you. If Roy has nothing to hide he wouldn't object. I don't want to post my e-mail here but you can get it off the Vision 2020 website.

Make way for the insults!

Joe

To Roy Atwood from Nick Gier, Dec. 1

Dear Roy,

You have a very short and selective memory about how this all came about.

In April, 2000, I was invited to speak before NSA faculty and students. I found it amazing that afterwards you claimed that you invited me. It was Doug Jones who made the gracious invitation and gave me the bottle of

French wine after the talk.

I prefaced my talk with a note of congratulations to Doug Wilson for the success of Logos School and NSA. I mentioned that fact that I had spent over 60 hours working with an NSA student on this thesis on Buddhism. I then offered to help any NSA student with future thesis work. My topic that day was Confucian virtue ethics and I suggested that I would love to work with any NSA student on Christian virtue ethics.

In a letter to the editor I mentioned your contributions to the UI as scholar and administrator. I was on cordial relations with Doug Wilson until November, 2003.

In December, 2002, I sent invitations to NSA faculty and students to attend the regional theology meeting that was to be held in Moscow in May, 2003. I was president that year and 40 percent of the papers were presented from faculty from conservative evangelical schools in the region. I now invite NSA faculty and students, once again, to attend the meeting in May, 2008, which will be held at conservative evangelical George Fox University.

At the beginning of 2003, we patiently waited for NSA faculty and student papers to arrive or at least an indication that NSA would attend. Institutions in the host campus' area always helped out in the past and sent all of their students. The May meeting came and NSA was conspicuously absent.

I wrote a letter to the Daily News lamenting this fact, and on May 23, you responded with a letter that implied that NSA was an accredited college but the accrediting agency was unclear.

It turned out that NSA was not accredited even though later NSA attorney Greg Dickinson, in testimony in a city hearing, testified that it was. NSA's credibility was crumbling and when the full history of zoning infractions were released, NSA's credibility was even further eroded.

Since 2003, I've invited you and your faculty to the regional meeting. When Ed Iverson first arrived, I sent him a personal invitation and requested that we dialogue. He refused and NSA continued to be absent from the regional theology meeting. As you yourself said in a letter to the editor: You "had better things to do."

And then came the news, in October, 2003, about Wilson's and Wilkins' slavery booklet. Wilson's response was quite incredible and very uncivil. Two UI history professors wrote a critique, and Wilson fired off a memo to Idaho's governor requesting that they be fired.

I e-mailed you about it and you started to defend Wilson's views. I wrote a response for Vision2020, and you promised to respond point by point. Instead of responding, you wrote an e-mail stating that you never wanted to talk or write to me again. I've honored your request until now.

The rest is history, and I've already repeated myself here about the particulars. As far as I'm concerned, you guys started it, and I have to say that I have no respect for you or Wilson.

With regard to the boycott list, I had nothing to do with it. I've not seen it and I don't want to see it. I don't eat at the French restaurant primarily because of the snotty response the chef made about his right to serve anything he liked regardless of what people thought about stuffing geese with food until they die.

His rhetoric was surprisingly like Wilson's, one that shows his "crawling over cut glass" total disregard for basic civil and academic standards.

There is, of course, much more I can say and have said in many venues. Please go to www.class.uidaho.edu/ngier/Wilson.htm for more details.

Atwood responds on Dec. 3

Joe, it saddens me that you have been quick to denounce my call for civility. My intention was not to address the same worn litany of accusations, but to respond to the latest nastiness with a plea for this to end. I chalk up your tone and charges to the inherent problems of emails and blogs, and to your passion for these issues, because I remember our last personal conversation in my office as cordial, fruitful, and pleasant. As I said then, and repeat again here, I welcome an opportunity to discuss with you our mutual concerns--any time.

If we do get together, and I hope we do, I'd like to address the issue I specifically raised in my column, namely, how are we going to get along civilly as members of the same community, given our strong differences of

opinion on a host of hot topics? Can we? How do we (on all sides) encourage a return to civility? Your responses here have been to repeat familiar charges, and even raise new accusations. But that's going to get us nowhere, I believe. We disagree on some key points. Are we simply left to a future of indeterminable electronic mudslinging back and forth? I hope not.

So I'd love to talk about how we move on from the current name calling and posting of accusations--on both sides. And I'd welcome the opportunity to sit down to a civil conversation with you again. Name the day/time.

And happy first week of advent!

Atwood responds on Dec. 3

Nick, I have not interacted with you in recent years because your blind prejudices have led you to distort and twist the truth, however obvious, in any way that would hurt Doug Wilson and people and things associated with him. As you have admitted many times on your own blog, you also have an abiding, lifelong prejudice against evangelical Christianity. More recently, you have campaigned to discredit NSA, written multiple letters trying to block our accreditation, posted absurd accusations on your blog, and even called or implied that most of us are either Taliban or Neo Nazis (in Boise's Idaho Statesman, no less).

As a former professor at a research university, you have failed to exercise due diligence in your rush to judgment. Every time I tried to suggest an alternative understanding to your claims, you twisted and distorted what I have said. So I saw little point in continuing our interactions.

But if you can demonstrate a genuine interest in the truth more than a willingness to pursue ax-grinding, I'd be interested in talking again. But as your many letters to the editor and comments above suggest, I don't think there is much I could say that would dissuade you of your deeply held and longstanding prejudices. If you truly believe you are open and genuinely interested in pursuing the truth wherever it leads, then I'd be willing to have another go at a conversation with you. But that will take some convincing given your history of animosity and prejudice toward Christ Church, Doug Wilson and NSA.

If you're really interested in pursuing this further, then I'd suggest an offline exchange.

Hope springs eternal.

Nick Gier responds on Dec. 3

Dear Roy:

Thank you for your response. We cannot go forward unless you and Wilson take responsibility for past actions and proclamations. We cannot go forward to the truth on a path that is littered with falsehoods, distortions, evasions, and deceptions. It just doesn't work that way.

Let me start with this one: "Every time I tried to suggest an alternative understanding to your claims, you twisted and distorted what I have said. So I saw little point in continuing our interactions." Since November, 2003, when you said that there would be no communication, you offered no "alternative understandings" at all. Please tell me where I have twisted or distorted anything.

Since you have not written to me, it would be impossible to do anything with non-existent replies. Since you failed to respond, you have 4-years of detailed responding to do. I eagerly await your individual replies. You failed miserably in the dialogue that you now seek. It should be very easy to correct "absurd accusations."

With regard to NSA accreditation, I challenge you show any untruths in my report. I wrote only one letter, not multiple ones. My focus in the report is on intellectual honesty, integrity, and academic collegiality. I was horrified that the head of TRACS would share my report with you after I requested confidentiality. I was also amazed that you were allowed to essentially work for TRACS (pitching "Trinitarian" accreditation) while NSA was still only a "candidate" for accreditation.

Why didn't you correct the record when Dickison said otherwise in public testimony. In your May 23, 2003 letter to the editor, why did you disguise the fact that TRACS was your agency, not the fine liberal arts associations you mention in the letter?

With regard to comparisons to the Taliban, here are the parallels: women are second class citizens; God's law will become the law of the land; execution of homosexuals and adulterers; and the destruction of one's enemies.

It would help very much if Wilson took back his belief in the limited franchise and his recent reaffirmation of executing gays. What would really help is for all of you to repudiate Greg Dickison's "when we have our way" articles in "Credenda Agenda." These are fundamental axes to grind, and I will keep grinding them.

In my column in the Statesman, all that I did was state that the League of the South frequently appears at protests with Sons of the Confederate Veterans (one of whose officers was married by Richard Butler), and the Council of Conservative Citizens. When editors put "neo-Nazi" in the headline, I immediately objected, and the editors refused to run a strongly worded letter of correction. A version of that letter ran in the Daily News.

With regard to my views on evangelical Christianity, all you have to do is read "God, Reason, and the Evangelicals" and see how I have been very careful in distinguishing ones that I respect and the ones that I do not. (Please read the book!) One does not become the president of a regional theological conference, which has many active evangelicals schools, if one is perceived to have a prejudice against evangelical Christianity.

In one of my internet essays, I have shown 15 differences between Wilsonian Christianity and conservative evangelical Christianity. You know just as well as I do that many other conservative Christians criticize you and I hear from them regularly praising by work of exposing Wilson for the theological fraud that he is.

As an emeritus professor I am not "former," but I continue to use my academic skills to teach and to write and to call people such as you to account.

I do not wish to communicate with you off-line as you suggest. I will keep my part of this new exchange fully within the public eye.

Thanks for the dialogue,

Nick Gier

Campbell responds on Dec. 3

Dear Roy,

I agree that our last meeting was "cordial ... and pleasant." "Fruitful"? I'm not so sure about that. At least it didn't seem any more fruitful than this recent exchange has been so far.

I won't hide the fact that I like you and enjoy your company. You're a nice guy and I've never had anything other than cordial and pleasant conversations with you -- interesting and thought provoking conversations, in fact. If all of the members of Christ Church were like you -- or like other friends of mine who work at NSA or like most of the other members of Christ Church that I've met -- perhaps there wouldn't be a problem. But problems remain.

One problem, and one issue that I have with you in particular -- not that it makes me dislike you, mind you -- is that you continue to play the 'bigot' card. You did it above in your response to Nick's post when you spoke of the "history of animosity and prejudice toward Christ Church, Doug Wilson and NSA." I've voiced many concerns, none of which have ever been addressed by you directly, so the suggestion that they are based on prejudice is careless and offensive. Not that I dislike you for it, mind you.

You did it again in your public response to the boarding house issue when you wrote about "zoning regulations being used against the College by those with anti-religious and ideological motives." Yet up to this point you have failed to answer one simple question: How on earth am I going to know whether or not a house that I buy is parked next to some boarding house unless boarding houses are required to apply for conditional use permits? This is a serious and honest question -- one that suggests that there was more behind the issue than mere prejudice. Thus far you have ignored it and I challenge you to respond to it now.

This theme was continued during the election when both Pastor Wilson and the "Christ Church member" who "hoisted a pre-election protest sign" called Linda Paul, Tom Lamar and Aaron Ament 'bigots.' Let me pause for a moment to note that two of these people are dear friends of mine and if they are bigots, then everyone is a bigot. They are among the most decent and wonderful people that I know. I have never had the privilege to meet Linda

Paul but the suggestion that she is a bigot is especially absurd. I won't repeat her résumé but currently 6 million Jews remain rolling in their graves because of that sign.

You said, in your original letter above, that Tom's discussion with Wilson ended "without inflammatory rhetoric or name-calling" but in point of fact at the very end Tom asked Wilson if he thought that Tom was a bigot and Wilson said "Yes." Wilson continued to call Tom a bigot after the discussion ended and would do so again should the need arise. You didn't note this in your essay but that is name-calling taken to the extreme. Do you deny this? Do you think that Wilson's charge of bigotry is not name-calling?

The history of NSA is another issue where you continue to play the 'bigot' card. Let me cut to the chase and ask these questions: Didn't NSA originally exist in a residential area? Didn't it move to another downtown business district prior to its current location? Weren't zoning complaints filed in each case? Didn't NSA have ample reason to believe that its current location was in violation of zoning laws and the comprehensive plan? Did you, Roy, have reason to believe, prior to locating NSA in its current location, that by doing so it would be in violation of zoning laws and the comprehensive plan? If you did not think that its current location was in violation of zoning laws, why?

There are a lot of explicit questions above and if you REALLY want civility, I ask that you take the time to answer them with Christian sincerity.

I thank you, also, for taking the time to respond to my concerns and I hope that you continue to do so!

From Gary Crabtree on Dec. 4

It would seem that the only way civility can be returned to discussions is if Mr. Atwood and by extension all of Christ Church/NSA answer for any and all allegations no matter how spurious going back into perpetuity. It seems that to Messrs. Campbell and Gier, the road to a civil discourse must first be paved by Atwood et. al. with copious explanations, abject apologies, and a complete and total acceptance of the Campbell/Gier point of view. Maybe it's just me but this seems a unreasonable demand for a simple request to tone down the heated rehtoric and enter into a more civil community discussion of matters.

From Roy Atwood to Joe Campbell and Nick Gier (Joe/Nick:

Because you're both demanding roughly the same thing as a PRECONDITION for civility, let me respond to you together on this point.

1. Your demands here (and many previous posts, and those that have followed your example) are fundamentally unjust because you demand proof of innocence. That demand violates the most basic principles of justice: people are innocent until proved guilty, and the burden of proof rests on the accuser, not the accused.

2. Your expectations of how your charges and accusations will be answered is also fundamentally unjust. You apparently want to be the public accusers or prosecutors (repeatedly posting these kinds of charges and accusations), but YOU cannot then also be the ones to whom we answer, the ones who decide guilt or innocence. No reasonable principle of justice allows the accuser to also serve as the finder of fact, judge and jury, as both of you are expecting to be here (again, as a PRECONDITION to civility). And because we currently have no neutral court to hear your charges (and the last City Council was certainly no neutral court) or hear our defense, there is currently no venue in which you could prove your charges or in which we could defend our innocence against false and spurious charges.

3. Sadly, your demands are, by your own admission, uncivil because you will allow civility only AFTER a (non-blind) judgment of our guilt or innocence on the accusations you have made. You say you don't need to be civil UNTIL we prove our innocence to your satisfaction. But the historic principle of presumption of innocence demands civility before judgment. Without that presumption, mob "justice" prevails (welcome to Moscow boycotts?). Whether you intend it or not, your position would basically institutionalize prejudice and condone uncivil actions based on mere prejudice (pre-judgment). And such actions taken against others on mere prejudice is a textbook definition of bigotry.

Contrary to your positions, I believe civility is a precondition to justice and fair judgment, not the other way around. Your expectations that we prove our innocence is unreasonable and unjust and at war with civility in principle.

As a related side note, if you had come to me in good faith, out of concern for truth and justice, seeking clarification on something we had said or done, I would have respected that and responded as fully and truthfully as possible. But you have not done that. In fact, I don't believe either of you have ever done that. Instead, your very first actions have been to post public charges and accusations against us and then demand that we clarify and give an account, BEFORE you ever verified what we actually believed or confirmed that you understood us correctly. As university research scholars, that's an inexcusable failure to do due diligence. Professors fail undergraduate papers regularly for that kind of sloppy research methodology.

Moreover, you commit the fallacy of many questions in your posts here (and elsewhere) by running off a veritable litany of complex (and often rhetorical or declarative) questions, but demanding simple answers (like "guilty!"). Complete responses would be virtually impossible to give in a reasonable length of time and space in this kind of venue on just one of your charges, let alone the dozens so glibly thrown about. And to answer only one or two appropriately would be (and already has been) judged by you and your friends above, again prejudicially, as confirmation of our guilt by silence.

In sum, I think your demands are unreasonable, unjust, unfair, prejudicial--and ultimately dangerous, if applied consistently to anyone in our community.

GCrabtree said it well (and more concisely) above. I asked for civility; you both responded with an inquisition as a precondition to civility. In other words, to my request for civility, your answer is basically, "No." That's too bad for the sake of our whole community.

But I remain optimistic, as I said in my column, that people of conscience on all sides of our divided community will embrace civility without preconditions.

Joe,

Your request for clarification about my statement re. the "history of animosity and prejudice" seems reasonable, but also very well supported independently by others such as the Daily News and Lewiston Trib's news columns and editorial pages. Fisher's most recent editorial in which HE (who has no dog in this fight and is not a CC member) calls the boycott (and he

includes the previous host of CC attacks in recent years) "bigoted." My point is not to bring up the "B" word again. Rather, Fisher's editorial demonstrates two things: (1) we're not the only ones in town who think that CC/NSA is being unjustly targeted and (2) that those other non-CC/NSA folks believe that the history of animosity against us has, to quote Fisher, "grown into a cancer." Those are strong words, but ones coming from non-CC/NSA quarters. We're not making this up.

I don't find the phrase you mention in my column, but I did use it in reference to Nick Gier's track record above, and that history is also very well documented on his own blog posts, Vision 2020, Daily News and Lewiston Trib letters to the editors and guest columns, New West unfiltered posts, and most notoriously his ID Statesman letter, which the Statesman editor correctly read as a charge of Neo-Nazism against us (despite Nick's attempt to soften it later). That letter apparently inspired one of Nick's fans or readers to scrawl "Hitler youth" outside the door of the College that very week. So that's just one additional part to the recent history. The Huskey-Lund-Opyr-Nolan-Bauer tax-zoning-boarding house complaints aim only at CC/NSA even though all the charges they made could have applied to any number of other non-profits, UI operators in the CBD, and hundreds of UI/WSU boarding house situations across the city. But these folks who filed the complaints singled us out, even though didn't live near the boarding houses, had no businesses even close to downtown, etc. Again, if that had been done to any other religious groups businesses or schools in town, the community would be outraged. You may deny that it's been happening because of a certain blindspot or wishful thinking, but it doesn't change the fact that others, notably our local newspapers, say it's been happening.

But the kinds of finger pointing that have been done to us, and that YOU're asking me to do in return (in a sense), are exactly what I'm suggesting we put an end to. Let's stop the he-said, she-said accusations--on both sides. There is obviously a history of it, and if you insist on getting to the bottom of every nasty detail, hell will freeze over before civility returns to Moscow and we'll be only more divided as a community. I don't think that's what you want. It certainly isn't what I want. I could recount all the places where I believe Nick, you, the Huskeys et al. have falsely accused us and done dirt on us. But I'd rather not. The point is, the whole community--not just you and I personally--need to move on to better, more productive discussions about important issues that touch us all. That is why I hope we can move beyond the interminable blog banter to some face-to-face personal

interactions, ala Tom Lamar's fine example. Again, I don't have illusions that we're all going to have a big group hug and our tensions will immediately go away. But can we please move on from here with some civility?

I know there's probably a million more things you and others want to discuss about my article, but I'm going to move on from this site to what I hope are more positive and productive things personally and professionally. If folks really want to discuss my column more with me, please feel free to email me directly at dratwood@nsa.edu. If you want to stop by for a cup of coffee (on me) and discuss issues of mutual concern, please call the NSA office at 882-1566 and set up an appointment.

Let me just conclude with my final plea in the column: "I encourage all Moscow citizens, on all sides of our local disagreements, to follow Tom's example. If we do, I'm optimistic that Moscow can once again embrace civility, despite the differences in our deeply held beliefs."

Have a wonderful Advent season.

Douglas James on Dec. 4:

I do not understand why Roy Atwood will not answer these questions. They seem fair. He made an accusation in his letter. If he wants civility, he should respond.

Why is it that he is allowed to call people names without supporting his claims in the very same letter in which he condemns others for name-calling?

Please, answer the questions and set the record straight!

Atwood on Dec. 4:

Joe,

Your request for clarification about my statement re. the "history of animosity and prejudice" seems reasonable, but also very well supported independently by others such as the Daily News and Lewiston Trib's news columns and editorial pages. Fisher's most recent editorial in which HE (who has no dog in this fight and is not a CC member) calls the boycott (and he

includes the previous host of CC attacks in recent years) "bigoted." My point is not to bring up the "B" word again. Rather, Fisher's editorial demonstrates two things: (1) we're not the only ones in town who think that CC/NSA is being unjustly targeted and (2) that those other non-CC/NSA folks believe that the history of animosity against us has, to quote Fisher, "grown into a cancer." Those are strong words, but ones coming from non-CC/NSA quarters. We're not making this up.

I don't find the phrase you mention in my column, but I did use it in reference to Nick Gier's track record above, and that history is also very well documented on his own blog posts, Vision 2020, Daily News and Lewiston Trib letters to the editors and guest columns, New West unfiltered posts, and most notoriously his ID Statesman letter, which the Statesman editor correctly read as a charge of Neo-Nazism against us (despite Nick's attempt to soften it later). That letter apparently inspired one of Nick's fans or readers to scrawl "Hitler youth" outside the door of the College that very week. So that's just one additional part to the recent history. The Huskey-Lund-Opyr-Nolan-Bauer tax-zoning-boarding house complaints aim only at CC/NSA even though all the charges they made could have applied to any number of other non-profits, UI operations in the CBD, and hundreds of UI/WSU boarding house situations across the city. But these folks who filed the complaints singled us out, even though didn't live near the boarding houses, had no businesses even close to downtown, etc. Again, if that had been done to any other religious groups businesses or schools in town, the community would be outraged. You may deny that it's been happening because of a certain blindspot or wishful thinking, but it doesn't change the fact that others, notably our local newspapers, say it's been happening.

But the kinds of finger pointing that have been done to us, and that YOU're asking me to do in return (in a sense), are exactly what I'm suggesting we put an end to. Let's stop the he-said, she-said accusations--on both sides. There is obviously a history of it, and if you insist on getting to the bottom of every nasty detail, hell will freeze over before civility returns to Moscow and we'll be only more divided as a community. I don't think that's what you want. It certainly isn't what I want. I could recount all the places where I believe Nick, you, the Huskeys et al. have falsely accused us and done dirt on us. But I'd rather not. The point is, the whole community--not just you and I personally--need to move on to better, more productive discussions about important issues that touch us all. That is why I hope we can move beyond the interminable blog banter to some face-to-face personal

interactions, ala Tom Lamar's fine example. Again, I don't have illusions that we're all going to have a big group hug and our tensions will immediately go away. But can we please move on from here with some civility?

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Have a wonderful Advent season.

December 5, 2007, 7:11 am [Joe Campbell](#) says:

Roy,

I have a hard time reading this and believing that your call for civility was genuine. You seem to want people to stop criticizing Christ Church while remaining able to play the 'bigot' card, suggesting that this criticism is entirely based on religious persecution. Your standard for civility seems to be: We can continue to insult you but you can say nothing about us in response.

Previous to this recent reply you wrote: "Your responses here have been to repeat familiar charges, and even raise new accusations. But that's going to get us nowhere, I believe." Yet you do the same in this post -- repeat familiar charges against the critics of Christ Church and raise new allegations. How is this going to get us anywhere? Why should others stop if you don't?

One of the familiar charges is that Nick had something to do with the comment 'Hitler Youth' which was written in CHALK on a public

SIDEWALK near NSA. Above you claim that no one has the right to say that offensive anonymous comments directed toward me in this post are the work of Christ Church members. Yet you continue to blame Nick for the actions of an anonymous fool. There is a double standard here.

Also, if you allow that some column from an editor in Lewiston is evidence that Christ Church is the victim of religious persecution, then I can use comments by the Southern Poverty Law Center, and their famous "Taliban on the Palouse" article in support of the claim that Wilson and others in Christ Church are bigots; I can use comments by Wilson's own father made in the New York Times to the effect that Christ Church and NSA are taking over the town; I can use sanctions levied against Christ Church by governing church bodies to show that Pastor Wilson is acting in a way that is un-Christian. All of this would be reason for the kind of boycott that you consider baseless.

The fact is there is a lot of anger directed toward Christ Church and plenty of reason behind the anger. This is why there is a wide-scale boycott of Christ Church owned businesses. Anyone who seeks for themselves the answers to the questions raised above that you did not answer will realize this. Until you, Wilson, Iverson, Courtney and others admit your own role in creating our current situation, the problem will not go away.

I have no plan to talk to you in private. What I want is for you to stop making unsupported claims that harm my reputation and the reputations of my friends. What I want is for you and others to publicly admit that Christ Church is not an innocent victim. Unless you do so, your call for civility is a joke.

Thanks for the 'response,' limited as it was, and I hope that you enjoy the Advent season, too!

best, Joe

Nick Gier on Dec. 5:

Dear Roy,

I fully agree with Joe's last response to you. If civility means that I cannot criticize your pastor or the administration of your college, then I don't want

to have any part of your sanitized one-way civility.

With regard to a history of animosity, I have already written, repeatedly, about my cordial relations with you, Wilson, and NSA before the slavery book explosion. That is when the community rift started, not before. Even after that, I've been civil and patient in trying to understand why you, Wilson, and others continue say and act the way you do.

You say that Joe and I have somehow deviated from academic protocol by engaging in a public debate about Christ Church and NSA, but I of course see these activities as no deviation at all. Public debate about basic issues, assuming that if one's points are back up with evidence and good reasoning, is what Academe is all about.

What was wrong with the fact that I felt it my moral and academic duty to release the fact about plagiarism in the slavery booklet? Wilson and Wilkins brought this on themselves. What is uncivil about pointing out that your position on the Trinity, as formulated by Wilson and Jones, is sloppy, incoherent, and at odds orthodox doctrine? As one trained in theology, I have a professional obligation to do this.

My own accreditation report on NSA was a sincere attempt to protect the Academy and challenge you to uphold basic academic standards and embrace academic collegiality. By allowing the hiring of Wilson's brother, son, and son-in-law and by engaging in unfounded attacks on UI faculty, you have broken fundamental principles of academic management and collegiality. Please note that these charges have nothing to do with the fact that yours is a Christian institution.

Let me respond you to absurd accusation that I caused any vandalism at NSA. First, of all, the editors at the Statesman ignored my own title for my column; and second, very few people in Moscow, read the Statesman, especially the miscreants that did the deed.

Those who have asked you to answer basic questions (Daily News On-Line) have a legitimate point, and your evasion is very frustrating. They are not demanding "proof of innocence" nor are they (this is quite incredible) "violating basic principles of justice." They are not asking you to change your basic positions, but simply to answer questions that you and Wilson have evaded for years.

Out of a sincere desire to know that assumes no preconditions for civility (primarily because my questions are civil!), I now want to ask you some very direct questions:

1. When Greg Dickison claimed in public testimony that NSA was accredited, when in fact it was not, why did you, as NSA president, not correct the record?
2. Why, as NSA president, didn't you counsel your senior fellow about proper academic protocol in responding to two UI history professors' response to his slavery booklet? I would have thought that you knew that calling for their dismissal was definitely not collegial.
3. Why have you gone along with inviting to Moscow, every year since 1994, the founding director of the League of the South (LOS), knowing full well that the revelation of this fact would cause deep concern in our community? The proper response is not to demonize the Southern Poverty Law Center, which calls the LOS a "hate group."
4. Why, after receiving yearly invitations, have you not encouraged your faculty and students to submit papers to the Pacific Northwest American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature? Every other evangelical college in the region, including TRACS schools, has participated except NSA.
5. Why, considering the fact that the U.S. has had a long tradition of harmonious private-public school relations, have you, as a church leader and private college administrator, stood by as your pastor and congregants have, over many years, attacked public schools in the most venomous ways?
6. Why do you ignore the basic fact that the two people who urged passage of boarding house ordinance did not target Christ Church? Rose Huskey did not testify at the hearings that I attended. This is not about religious persecution; rather, it is about zoning violations and tax evasion.

You and your colleagues have no moral grounds to request that others in the community to be civil. Furthermore, you have only yourself to blame that you now complain about having to answer so many questions. You are the one who refuse to communicate and answer my initial points about the

slavery booklet.

You have a lot of catching up to do, and while you are at it, please give me a list of my false accusations. I promise to respond promptly with the evidence that I've always provided.

Thanks for the dialogue,

Nick