

We invited Harrison Butker to speak at our college. We won't bow to cancel culture.

Stephen D. Minnis | Opinion contributor

The reaction to commencement speech by Kansas City Chiefs kicker Harrison Butker reaffirmed Benedictine College's commitment to be a university in the full sense of the word.

Benedictine College is on a mission to transform culture in America, but we didn't expect one commencement address to put us in the center of our country's current culture wars. The experience, though, is a good reminder that the mission we have is more important than ever. Let me explain.

Benedictine, the college I serve as president in Atchison, Kansas, was the site of the recent graduation speech by Harrison Butker, kicker of the Kansas City Chiefs. In retrospect, it had all the elements needed to go viral: It was given by the high scorer from the last two Super Bowls who quoted Taylor Swift and offered views on politics, religion and gender roles.

No one expected it to be as big as it became, though. Suddenly the speech and reactions were everywhere. It was the topic of the "Today" show and "Fox & Friends," "The View" and "The Daily Wire," NPR and the BBC.

Universities were not created to be 'safe spaces'

We decided not to comment publicly on the speech. For one reason, doing so could just incite the haters again.

The other reason is even more significant: The demand that we weigh in on Butker's speech is exactly the kind of problem Benedictine College hopes to counteract in American culture.

We've hosted cardinals and bishops, a U.S. House speaker and a governor, authors and businesspeople, entertainers and athletes. Until this year, no one ever asked us if we shared their views, attacked us for hosting them, or demanded that our commencement speakers be chased from the public square, silenced and fired. This sort of reaction is wrong.

Our history as educators goes back over 1,500 years. Benedictines began schools across Europe for students to share the learning of monks and sisters who are guided by the Rule of St. Benedict, written in the sixth century.



From the start, our universities were not created to be "safe spaces" where people cocoon themselves away from ideas that challenge them. They were institutions that guarded their faith fiercely, but where every question was posed and vigorously investigated.

Because of that, after the Roman empire fell, Benedictines transformed Western civilization through their mission of community, faith and scholarship by creating abbeys, liturgy and schools.

Community is the answer to cancel culture

The reaction to Butker's speech reaffirmed Benedictine College's commitment to be a university in the full sense of the word. The same Benedictine mission can be just as powerful in America as it was in Europe: Community is the answer to the cancel culture; faith is the answer to the culture of unbelief; and scholarship is the answer to the culture of relativism.

As a Benedictine school, transforming culture is in our DNA, and as a U.S. college, transforming culture is our patriotic duty. St. Pope John Paul II noted that democracies can easily become anti-cultures controlled by "the wishes of the few."

But, he said, "the United States possesses a safeguard, a great bulwark, against this happening. I speak of your founding documents: the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights. These

documents are grounded in and embody unchanging principles of the natural law whose permanent truth and validity can be known by reason, for it is the law written by God in human hearts."

So Benedictine College is building a new classically designed library reminiscent of Independence Hall in Philadelphia, with a replica of the Assembly Room and the Liberty Bell to teach about the founding principles. We are in the early stages of a proposed new school of medicine that will enshrine Catholic moral teaching on the infinite dignity of the human person as created by God.

Pope Benedict XVI said the hallmark of a Catholic university is that we share Christ's love with our students. I tell each professor we hire that here we love our students.

When we do our job right, we educate students in our mission on campus, and then they build community, faith and scholarship in all walks of life, in their neighborhoods and cities.

Benedictine College will continue to work on transforming culture in America, so that one day, all Americans, and not just Super Bowl stars, can be free to speak their minds and engage each other without being shouted down, threatened and intimidated.

I wish we were there already.

Stephen D. Minnis is president of Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas.