

“Thought for the Day” on Math Exams

In my early years at Seminole Community College, I used to quote scripture at the bottom of exams in the form of a “Thought for the Day.” This was intended to be a positive thought or a word of encouragement to students taking the test. In addition to presenting a word of encouragement, it also enabled me to establish my identity as a young Christian college professor who cherished the values of Jesus and who wanted the best for my students. For the most part, students seemed to appreciate my efforts, and my positive thoughts were helpful to most.

Of course, there were some students and faculty who did not appreciate my practice. After a couple of years of this, the department chairman called me to his office to discuss the matter. I told him that I realized that I probably would have to stop doing this, and to my surprise, he replied, “Oh, I’m not telling you to stop! I’m just saying to be careful! People are watching you.” So, for about 5 years in the later 1970s, I quoted scripture at the bottom of all my exams in my “Thought for the Day.”

[By the way, in my early years at Seminole in the 1970s, there were very strong and positive feelings on the campus towards Judeo-Christian family values. Perhaps I was naïve, but I could not imagine there could be any other way. So many people in leadership positions and workers on campus were either Christian or espoused Christian values. Treating students, faculty, and staff with respect and dignity, helping them to succeed in college, that’s what we all were there for. Hostility towards Judeo-Christian values, and the message and person of Jesus Christ was NOT there originally.]

Finally, after about 5 years, the department chairman called me to his office again. This time, his message for me was that it was a violation of separation of church and state, and I must stop quoting scriptures on exams—either that, or take the matter up with the Dean of Instruction! So, I collected a few samples of my “Thoughts for the Day,” and took them over to discuss with the Dean. The Dean suggested, “Why don’t you quote OTHER sources, like other great leaders and perhaps even other religions?” I told him that the Bible was the only source that I really trusted and that I really cared to quote. So, the Dean concluded that I should stop doing this on exams.

A short time passed, and I was surprised to learn that the Dean of Instruction had been diagnosed with cancer, and he was taking an early retirement. I also heard that he had become involved in the Community Methodist Church in Casselberry, that he was singing in the choir, seemed to have a renewed outlook on life. A few years went by, and I learned that the Dean had passed away! I attended his funeral in 1990, and to this day, I still have the brochure from the service. In the Dean’s funeral service, they read verses from the Old Testament, the Psalms, the Gospels, and the Pauline Letters. I counted them up, and I can show you today, over 100 verses of scripture were read aloud in that service—not ONE quotation from “other sources”! Have you EVER seen a funeral with so much scripture? Obviously, the Bible had become a cornerstone in the Dean’s life, especially when he faced the raging enemies of cancer and death. His renewed outlook on life was most likely due to a touch from the Lord that enables us to live with peace and hope in the midst of the troubles of life. I often wonder if his conversation with me that day in his office about my

“Thoughts for the Day” might have helped him find that touch from the Lord when he needed it most!! I believe in Heaven some day, we can discuss this. I wonder if other people were helped by the “Thoughts for the Day.” I suspect there were. The Bible says that God’s Word will not return void.

After I had been told by the Dean that I should STOP quoting scripture on exams, I still had some old exams from previous classes that might be helpful to students for extra practice in preparation for upcoming exams. On one particular Monday morning, I had an 8:00 a.m. College Algebra class. I had been up most of the night before with a migraine headache. Driving to work that morning involved driving due East, INTO the sun. The headache was bad enough that I could have called in sick, but I hated to miss class on the day before an exam! So I made the decision to go to class no matter how I felt. After driving into the sun to get to class, and I felt terrible and probably looked even worse. Although I have never tasted alcohol, I must have looked as if I had been on a drunk all night long! My students have never seen me look so BAD. When I arrived at the classroom, the first thing I did was hand out the old practice exams that had a scripture on them. I pointed out that I had been advised to stop giving my “Thought for the Day,” and I assured everyone that this was NOT an assignment. No one was required to take a copy, but it was just an OPTIONAL practice test for anyone who wanted one! The instant I pointed out the scripture on the practice test, the headache left me IMMEDIATELY! Every student in that room saw me transformed from a man in terrible pain who could hardly stand up, into a man who NEVER felt better! It was MIRACULOUS! It was a TERRIFIC class! The healing was so complete, I thought my “headache days” were over, and I would never have another one. Well, I did have more headache days, but as several years past, I had less and less headaches. Today, I just don’t get headaches anymore. Praise the Lord!

[Return to homepage](#)

Dr. Robert J. Rapalje, Retired
Seminole State College of Florida
Altamonte Springs Campus
Email: rapaljer@mathinlivingcolor.com