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ARCHIVES

# Religion As the Integrating Principle in Education

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D 'YE think," asked Mr. Hennessey, "the college has much to do with the progress of the world?" — "D'ye think," parried Mr. Dooley, "it's the mill that makes the water run?"

The stream of life in this old world goes steadily on, whether we have colleges or not. But the fact is, in spite of Mr. Dooley's skeptical cynicism, that the world would hardly be the same without them. These centers of human learning have played a major role in harnessing and developing the raw material of this world — man, his mind, and his physical environment. Today especially these academic mills score high in the esteem and confidence of men and nations. The human family looks to them to grind out the answers on many subjects: science, agriculture, economics, education, politics, and so on. How now, Mr. Dooley? 'Tis a large order! The stream keeps running on and growing wider. Surely 'tis yourself must be agreein' that these mills be very vital?!

The critics of our friendly Irishman will observe: So what? Who ever doubted the importance of the colleges? Why argue about something which common consent has long established as true? "Thou say'st an undisputed thing in such a solemn way!" — to borrow Oliver Wendell Holmes' apostrophe to a katydid. The big question really is, Are we educating for the needs of modern man? Are the centers of higher learning, our colleges and universities, helping man to keep his footing under the constant shift and drift of the stream of life?

Before that question can be answered satisfactorily, we must know something about modern man. Essentially he is little different from a man like David, who, musing over his insignificance before the Creator, was led to ask: "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?"<sup>1</sup> Things have not changed much from that day to this. Though man's environment has altered considerably, he himself has not. Life's big issues are the same for him as for David or any other figure of antiquity. Simply stated, man still has to learn to

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<sup>1</sup> Ps. 8:4.

live with himself, with others, with his God — and that is nothing new. He may object on the last item and claim that belief in a god is one of the last things to concern him, but “experience confirms the thought of Christian anthropology, namely, that man must always have either God or an idol.”<sup>2</sup> The history of the people Israel and their neighbors confirms this solidly.

Whether man is ready to admit it or not, his basic need remains the same in any century: he must see himself as God sees him, sinful, corrupt, and lost. The holy Law of God is able to achieve this effect in him. Like the goblet which one takes and turns upside down to pour out its contents, the Law of God is able to take hold of man and pour out completely the poison of his pride and self-trust. But this in itself is not enough. It would leave man in a swept and garnished condition but dangerously empty. Besides this emptying out under the convicting criticism of the Law of God, man must be led by the Gospel, the Spirit’s efficacious tool, to receive Christ to himself in faith as his personal God and Redeemer from sin. The importance of this reception is based on the Savior’s own clear declaration: “If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins,”<sup>3</sup> or stated positively, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.”<sup>4</sup> This is what the Christian sincerely believes and what he experiences by believing. Regenerated, he has a new relationship with God the Father and with the world about him. He is equipped for life’s great adventure — faith active in love. “Just as the sinful burden of unbelief clearly cripples the joy and brightness of all of man’s willing, feeling, and thinking, so the remission of guilt and the imputed righteousness that is granted to faith affects his whole existence and manifests itself in all his actions.”<sup>5</sup>

The Christian life after conversion can be likened to a wheel, now no longer performing with narrowing, self-centered, centripetal force, but with centrifugal sweep in the direction of men around it. It is at this point that Christian ethics can be pictured as “love

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<sup>2</sup> Emil Brunner, *Divine Imperative*, p. 18; cf. also Chad Walsh, *Campus Gods on Trial*, pp. xi—xiv.

<sup>3</sup> John 8:24.

<sup>4</sup> John 14:6.

<sup>5</sup> A. Koeberle, *Quest for Holiness*, p. 77.

gone off on an errand." Love for the Master impels the Christian disciple to act and obey in devoted service to Him. Christian living has no higher motive, no greater dynamic, than this love in the sinner for his Savior. It not only keeps the ships in the convoy in proper relation, as C. S. Lewis likens the life of the Christian in his relationship with his fellow men, but also helps the believer to keep the port, the goal, squarely in sight.<sup>6</sup> As Jesus promised, the believer now knows the Father and finds the fulfillment of purpose in his life.

The proper relationship of a man with his God has direct bearing on his adjustment to life. It provides him solid footing and certainty on the big issues of life and eternity. He has a wisdom and judgment on these matters which affords him a tranquil adaptation to life that often amazes his fellows. The Jews once addled their wits about Jesus: "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? Jesus answered them and said, My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me."<sup>7</sup> That expresses exactly the certitude of knowledge which the Christian has about God and things spiritual. Not merely is his knowledge more complete, but it has a proper focus, an integrating principle, which lends meaning to all of his environment in society and orientation to all of his intellectual pursuits as a searching, discerning human being. No doubt it was this for which Dr. George D. Stoddard, now dean of the College of Education, New York University, was in part groping when he was asked on a Town Hall Meeting of the Air: "What are some of the things education should do to get its house in order?" He replied: "I think we need a *common core*.<sup>8</sup> . . . We have fragmented the curriculum. The students go from one class to another and get little bits of knowledge, and we haven't got as yet, except in an experimental way in a few colleges and universities, a basic common knowledge of a type which can become a universality of exchange . . . and give to every student a common core which will mark him as an educated man."<sup>9</sup> Christianity alone has such a "uni-

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<sup>6</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> John 7:15, 16.

<sup>8</sup> This writer's italics.

<sup>9</sup> "Are We Educating for the Needs of Modern Man?" The Town Hall, Inc., Vol. 14, No. 39.

versality of exchange," or integrating principle, to offer man in the simple truth: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."<sup>10</sup> This is the foundation of all human understanding, the formula for interpreting and integrating modern scientific and technological discovery for the good of mankind.

What has been said is not man's usual discovery about himself and his existence. The philosophies of men, representing the apex of human thought, repeat a different story with pathetic sameness in every generation. The hedonist, for example, has always held that pleasure is the key to a meaningful life, arguing, "How can anything so good be bad?" Jeremy Bentham, a hedonist of loftier frame, introduced his famous "hedonistic calculus," from which the conclusion was drawn that virtue is "correct moral arithmetic." Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias* spoke for all naturalists who took up the mantle after him: "Right is judged to be the rule and advantage of the mightier over the feebler. . . . We might call it nature's own law."<sup>11</sup> Relativists do not show much change either from the day of Protagoras ("Man is the measure of all things"), through the day of Nietzsche ("If there were a God, I could not endure not being he"), to the present humanistic schools of various brands, epitomized best perhaps by the late barb-tongued demigod (according to his own estimate), H. L. Mencken, who questioned everything but Mencken.

The last decade has seen a considerable swing away from these "gods" of men. Even the colleges and campus leaders of today have expressed open distrust for them, and in their stead has come a more friendly attitude toward the God of revelation. Harvard University, for example, tolerates a president, Nathan M. Pusey, in its ivied halls who dares to speak with some conviction about Jesus who "came into the world to save sinners." Things have changed from the day when Charles W. Eliot, of those same classic towers, led the intellectuals of his day in critical repudiation of evangelical Christian faith, creeds, and churches.

But the revival of religious emphasis at the present moment must also be carefully analyzed and evaluated, though surely not sum-

<sup>10</sup> Ps. 111:10.

<sup>11</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, 484c.

marily dismissed in arbitrary fashion as unreal. Much of it, to be sure, will be found to fall into the familiar threefold pattern which always distinguishes man's efforts at religion — legalism, mysticism, and rationalism, or sometimes a combination of all three. Adolf Koeberle, in his *Quest for Holiness*, has aptly put the tab on all three: "The sanctification of conduct by the strengthening of the will; the sanctification of the emotions by a strenuous training of the soul; the sanctification of thought by the deepening of the understanding; moralism, mysticism, speculation, these are the three ladders on which men continually seek to climb up to God, with a persistent purpose that it seems nothing can check; a storming of heaven that is just as pathetic in its unceasing efforts as in its final futility."<sup>12</sup>

It is not our purpose primarily to categorize the new trends in religious interest, but rather to observe that, as a result of religion's new popularity today on the campuses, the problem is no longer one of finding sympathetic support for the program of the churches. A growing number of prominent individuals are speaking out in behalf of man's spiritual orientation in this age of scientific and technological achievement. In an address entitled "Spiritual and Moral Responsibility in Higher Education," for example, Dr. David Dodds Henry, president of the University of Illinois, stated recently: "In history, in literature, in the arts and humanities, and in many other ways, spiritual and moral values are of preeminent concern. Because the public university cannot be sectarian, nor institutionally dogmatic in religious matters, it does not follow that its program is unrelated to the spiritual and the moral. Quite the opposite is true."<sup>13</sup>

This earnest sentiment describes the climate generally prevailing on the nation's campuses today. However, these same campuses and their leaders, while refreshingly congenial to religion's place in the life of every student, recognize the inevitable limitations which are forced upon them as state institutions and, therefore, point with emphasis to the part which the homes and churches of

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<sup>12</sup> p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> D. D. Henry, "Spiritual and Moral Responsibility in Higher Education," address at the George R. Carr Recognition, University of Illinois YMCA publication, November 3, 1955, p. 2.

our communities are to play. "Let us be clear in our expectation of the college experience. It cannot fill the gap of a lifetime of religious illiteracy; nor can it often supply religious motivation in the young adult who has not been so influenced by home, church, and community in all the pre-college years. The campus has too often been unfairly criticized for not doing the pre-college job in religious education and religious practice. I am convinced that no youth who has had foundations of religious education and commitment will find anything in college life but their strengthening, in the company of a generally idealistic and dedicated faculty."<sup>14</sup> This is rather glowing optimism on the part of a man who heads an academic faculty which numbers over 3,000 individuals.

Perhaps we will take exception to the accuracy of this self-diagnosis of the university's attitude toward spiritual values. However, before we do, it might be well to remember what exactly the colleges are endeavoring to do. They merely want to keep the atmosphere congenial to the pursuit and practice of religion and to enlist the homes and the churches to do their best with their opportunities, as the universities seek to do when the student is under their academic influence. A few years ago Dr. Robert Maynard Hutchins, then president of the University of Chicago, expressed a similar opinion: "I venture to suggest that if we wish to restore the family and the church to their pristine vigor we shall not do it by depriving them of their function. One reason why they have developed some tendency to anaemia may be that we think that the school can do what they have done. The school can't. The school's attempt to perform the duties of the family and the church simply means that it will fail in its own proper task and theirs too."<sup>15</sup>

This attitude on the part of the campuses has not always existed, it is true, and the notions of "religion" have, of course, differed widely from one man or campus to the next. But perhaps in times past the criticism of the schools of higher learning has also been of too arbitrary and generalizing a nature, for the homes and the churches themselves were often failing to achieve the ultimate in

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> R. M. Hutchins, "Education for Freedom," *Harper's*, October 1941.

the religious education and commitment of their youth. This is not intended as a whitewash of the campuses and their "gods." Their gods are legion, and they make no apologies for it. The main question, however, is, Have we as Christians, and as Christian churches, done all within our power to supply the religious content and motivation in the education process of our young people? We have a responsibility which cannot lightly be set aside.

There is another side to this problem, one which is often forgotten or overlooked. It is usually agreed that the colleges themselves must not endeavor to supplant the homes and the churches in their proper spheres of teaching religion and morality, but the question is not entirely settled with that dismissal of responsibility. What about the Christian faculty members? Are they split personalities who can completely separate their Christianity from their classroom activities? No instructor is expected, of course, to make active propaganda for his faith and the doctrine of his church, but must he leave the field untrammelled and uncontested to the whims and dogmas of the humanist, relativist, and naturalist? When a Vanderbilt student, for example, states that, "If I had a dollar for every faculty member who in my four years at school has been willing to meet me as a human being and not just as a student, I couldn't get home on a bus," maybe the point to emphasize is that the university as such ought not to be faulted as much as the individual Christians on the faculty who had done little to let their Christianity shine through. If these individuals in their various departments, leaders in the arts and sciences, could not demonstrate the integrating principle of knowledge which their Christian faith should have brought them, but taught their subjects with as little correlation to life and God as the relativists and humanists at their side, then the student's criticism above was justified.

The church must surely charge these faculty members, whose scholarship has placed them in positions of highest influence, with the responsibility of showing in their academic subjects and methods their own integration of life and knowledge as believers in Christ. If it is a duty in other vocations, and in the area of social and political function, it is true certainly in the academic. A Christian teacher ought to be able to help his students see that there are sound principles of action to be followed, taught by Christian ethics,

when they face life's choices and decisions, and that these apply even when all alternatives apparently are evil to some degree. These principles may not always be the commonly accepted ones, more often probably not. But they will be right. The student should be able to find such a genuinely Christian philosophy of life in his Christian instructor, who besides being a teacher is a counselor too. It is no overstatement that the soundness of the Christian instructor's advice and interpretation will be in direct proportion to the soundness of his own connection with and understanding of Christ, his Lord, the Master Teacher. And he will often find after careful reflection that, as he faces and seeks to sift through the prevailing trends of thought on his campus, his own convictions and philosophy of life will run in a cross-current to the main stream. That need not disturb him, if he remembers that Jesus, too, "while He was no political revolutionary in the modern sense . . . had a habit of reversing the order of things men took for granted."<sup>16</sup> The thoughtful Christian educator can definitely "meet his students as human beings" and point them toward the integrating principle which will aid them in fashioning their fragments of knowledge into units of action for the good of themselves and society.

The question is sometimes raised: What about putting the Bible directly into the curriculum for college students? Would not that solve the whole problem? Some educational leaders believe that it would and have initiated courses which use the Bible. They recognize the spiritual impact for good which it invariably produces. Paul H. Douglas, for example, educator and United States Senator from Illinois, who appeared with Dr. Stoddard on the Town Hall program previously referred to, stated that "schools, along with families, church, and individuals, need to help us all develop a greater sense of emotional, intellectual maturity to match the technological maturity of our times, and the terrible strains to which we, as a people, are exposed." In answer to a question on putting the Bible directly into the curriculum, Senator Douglas observed: "I would say that any system is incomplete which does not include the study of the Bible." But—and this is where the

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<sup>16</sup> J. C. Bennett, *Christian Ethics and Social Policy*, p. 11.

fine sentiments usually leave off — he then proceeded to enlarge on the perennial difficulty of teaching the Bible in public schools and colleges.

But there is a solution to the problem, at least on the higher education level, and more and more colleges and universities are beginning to see its possibility. Religion credit courses are coming into their own. Today more than two thirds of the hundred or more state colleges and universities have some system of religious education coupled with their academic program. Some of these arrangements are bound to be quite unsatisfactory, for example, where the course is taught as part of a department's program (English, sociology, philosophy, etc.), or where a religion department is set up with a faculty member or two and is charged with the responsibility of teaching "religion" to a student body of varied denominational background. In both instances the goal will be "objectivity" in instruction, careful avoidance of sectarian views, and broad interpretations designed to offend nobody. Whatever religion is left will inevitably find its level at the lowest common denominator, leading to little or no real religious commitment on the part of the student. No instructor in any of the other academic disciplines would be expected to teach under such a hamstrung arrangement. The flaw in both of the systems described is simply that they fail to recognize the plain fact of the plurality of religious denominations on the campus.

Steps toward an adequate solution of the problem are taken when the colleges and universities recognize the religious denominations at work around the campus and with them establish a program for the teaching of accredited religion courses. Two methods have been worked out, one where the instructors are actually on the faculty and use university facilities, though they are sponsored and salaried by their own denomination, as at the University of Iowa; the other where qualified instructors of the respective churches are recognized by the university for the teaching of religion credit courses in the facilities furnished by the churches, as at the University of Illinois. Of the two types the latter seems far more feasible and attainable at the average state college or university. Under both, however, the instructors have complete freedom to teach according to the dictates of their conscience and

the dogma of their church. The courses to be offered are left to the discretion of the instructor (at the University of Illinois a course prospectus must be submitted to the university before a new course can be introduced). Obviously under such a flexible arrangement it is possible for any church worth its salt, particularly our Lutheran Church, to introduce sound religious instruction. The university maintains contact with the program through a system of faculty visitation, assuring itself in this way that the instructor and the courses remain on an accepted college level of performance.

Here, if anywhere in higher education, is the opportunity of achieving that sought-after integrating principle. There is no more direct and effective way of reaching the minds and hearts of our college youth with the truths of God's Word, and there is no need to surrender a single inch from our confessional position. Moreover, the likelihood of opposition from the enemies of Christianity over the introduction of "sectarianism" in the state colleges is reduced to an absolute minimum, because the courses are in every case elective, with attendance voluntary. Then, too, it should be remembered that colleges have invariably enjoyed greater freedom in this area. Existing laws and court decisions deal almost exclusively with religion in grade schools. The college student, whose maturity and ability to judge for himself have always been cited in defense of the various "isms" rife on the campus, surely will find no greater problem in sifting among the religion courses offered. In fact, the chief problem will be that the students will have to be sold on the idea of enrolling for the courses, since they are electives. And here the best promotion will naturally be the reputation which the courses achieve in the minds of the students.

The experiences of two years with the program at the University of Illinois have served to confirm the great potential which these Lutheran credit courses offer our church and its youth. The comment of an engineering student, who completed the course in Christian ethics, is typical of the reaction of other students:

The formal study of Christian ethics has really and truly meant more than could be expressed. . . . It has been for me, a person with a weak faith, an almost marvelous strengthening of faith. I feel that I am better qualified to make the decisions necessary in adult life because of my strengthened faith and more detailed

knowledge of what the Scriptures say on ethical matters. The course has, I feel, benefited me more as a person and a Christian than any course I have had at the University.

The needs of this student were met. Plainly the "common core" for which modern education is striving can be had in the orientation for life and thought which religion credit courses afford.

With state colleges and universities growing by leaps and bounds in size, importance, and faculty prominence under the postwar pressure of student influx, and with future expansion guaranteed by whopping budgets (while private institutions are languishing under endowments which have not kept pace with inflation), it is obvious that the religion credit course program at these schools mounts in strategic significance and value with the matriculation of every new class of freshmen. Our church has an opportunity in this field which dare not be underestimated. Economically and geographically it is a sound approach to the problem. At most of the major colleges and universities our church already has student chapels and centers which will lend themselves easily, or which can be expanded, to include a religion credit course program. The climate on the campuses is favorable now, as can be seen from the fact that many of the colleges and universities have shown themselves amenable to the suggested program once it was presented to them in workable form. The church, it seems, has a tremendous opportunity to grasp. So far-reaching are the possibilities of this venture that the question simply crystallizes to this, Are we ready to capitalize fully on this new trend in the ministry to our college youth? It may spur us on a little to make up for time lost, if we know that the Roman Catholic Church is already giving this program top priority in its campus ministry. If the college-trained youth are the acknowledged leaders of tomorrow in the state and in the church, then we, too, must channel greater resources and more manpower in the direction of the campuses of America.

Said a Scotsman wryly, as he boarded a ship home after a visit to the excavations being made by Sir Arthur Evans at ancient Knossos on the island of Crete: "The moral of Knossos is that good plumbing will not save a civilization." Obviously the art and architecture treasures did not impress him as much as the relics of technological advance in that early day and the fact that doom

came anyway. Could it perhaps be that another visitor, Scot or otherwise, to our shores at some distant date, finding the Crane and Kohler relics in the rubble, will have little more to observe about our civilization?

About two years ago the United States Bureau of the Census produced a 1,065-page statistical volume recording facts and figures about our people, their health, their industries, natural resources, and many other things. *Time* magazine in reporting on its appearance concluded the article with the succinct observation: "During the 1940s, the number of homes with indoor plumbing increased by over 10,000,000. But there are still 11 million homes with an outdoor privy or none at all."<sup>17</sup> — When our burgeoning standard of living has corrected that alarming "blight," then what? Will America have reached the zenith of its civilization and technological advance? There is no salvation in that. Should it be the purpose of our modern educational system merely to remove these technological sore spots and raise the standard of living for our civilization? Beware the fate of Knossos!

Our modern education pattern fails if we have not brought people to their Savior. But couple Eph. 3:19: "And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God," with Micah 6:8: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?" and the problem is solved for life and eternity.

Champaign, Ill.

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<sup>17</sup> *Time*, November 29, 1954, p. 14.