

The University and The Study of Religion

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"That courses in Religion should be incorporated in the Arts curriculum of every university"—so ran a resolution passed in one of the study commissions at the International Seminar of World University Service of Canada in 1956. The commission was composed of 17 students from 7 different countries (Canadians being the largest group) including all the main branches of Christianity, 2 Muslims, and a number of uncommitted "agnostics." This motley group had spent a total of 12 hours discussing "The University and Religion." At the first meeting, diversity of view ranged all the way from the feeling that religion had no place on the campus to a demand for compulsory courses in Christianity in all Canadian universities. By the end of the series of discussions unanimity was reached on the above resolution.

What were the grounds for this conclusion? So much has already been written and said on this subject that it is difficult to know what to select for an article of this length, particularly as the salient arguments are already so well known. However, the experience of the Seminar study commission indicates that there are still many students who have at least not fully digested these arguments, so that they may still be worth repeating.

Perhaps the better way of phrasing the question is: what have been the grounds for the virtual banishment of religion from Canadian university curricula? Even as recently as the day when this University of King's College was first chartered by George III, Theology was still "the queen of the sciences." Philosophy was her handmaid; classical languages were studied for the light they shed on the meaning of Scripture and the writing of the Fathers, and even mathematics and physics were still regarded primarily as aids to the understanding of God's plan for His universe. The statutes which, till a century ago, disabled any but Anglicans from entering the universities of Oxford and Cambridge bear quaint but eloquent testimony to the durability of the idea that the education of minds that had not first been instilled with right religious thinking was at best meaningless and at worst dangerous.

The antithesis, therefore, that higher education is only valid when it itself is completely "objective" and fed to minds unconditioned by religious prejudice is really still quite modern and revolutionary. The cult of objectivity is inseparably associated with "liberal humanism," the optimistic view of man which holds that, provided a man is

well enough educated, in the sense of having sufficient objective facts rather than opinions, at his disposal, he will ipso facto make the right choices and the right use of these facts. "Great is truth, and shall prevail."

This doctrine is still very appealing to the "western" mind. Its affinity with the ideas of social and political democracy and with freedom in general is obvious. It was, therefore, perhaps inevitable that it should be the turn of the century to have become the dominant philosophy in the universities of those parts of the world where these concomitant ideas had taken firmest root. Unfortunately, however, the optimistic assumptions underlying liberal humanism have not been entirely borne out by history's most recent half-century. In the collective sphere, two "hot" wars, an apparently chronic "cold" war, and the still-remembered depression of the "dirty 30s," and in the individual sphere the mounting toll of mental illness in the democratic world, all challenge the basic assumption that man's increasing mastery of facts will inescapably help him to realize the good life.

Thus it is that within the lifetime of university students of today the cult of objectivity has begun to be called in question. A spate of literature, of which Moberly's "Crisis in the University" remains the primary text-book, has poured forth to question whether objectivity is even a valid concept, let alone a desideratum. Outside mathematics and physics (and even here has not a mere Artsman heard of something called "The Principle of Indeterminacy?"), where does one encounter "pure" fact divorced from opinion? Certainly not in history, and still less the social sciences, while the bankruptcy of such applied science as meteorology was amply demonstrated just last weekend! Facts are supposedly objective by definition; but knowledge presupposes a knower, and education, the imparting of knowledge, a teacher and taught, so that these terms, also by definition, become ineluctably subjective.

If in fact the very pursuit of objectivity becomes a will-o'-the-wisp, the foundations of the philosophy which has dominated university education in the West for three generations begin to shake. But this is only the beginning. For the blithe assumption that the mere accumulation of a sufficient store of "objective facts," or in other words sufficient education, would automatically lead man into the good life has always been vulnerable to logical assault. Such phrases as "the good life" or "right decisions" quite

obviously involve that extreme of subjectivity, the value judgement. If it is objected that I myself have set up the man of straw that I am now knocking down, I can only answer that I know of no way of phrasing the aim (subjective word!) of university education which does not involve the idea of value as well as fact. I remain open to correction.

The thesis of this article, then, is that objectivity in university education is illusory, that the area of pure fact is severely circumscribed, that the accumulation of facts as knowledge involves human agency which introduces subjectively (beautifully, if ironically, illustrated in the Principle of Indeterminacy in physics), and pre-eminently that the use to which knowledge is put constantly involves human judgements of value. From this it follows clearly that it is at least as important to educate men's ability to form valid judgements as their ability to ascertain and accumulate facts.

This conclusion appears so obvious that it is amazing that universities in the Western world have so long eschewed an entrance into this field of the study of norms. We have vestigial remains in courses in Ethics in Departments of Philosophy, but generally the cult of objectivity has desiccated such courses by banning enthusiasm or commitment. Actually, because of the impossibility of complete objectivity, teachers of Arts subjects, notably literature, the social sciences, philosophy, and history, have continued to show their individual predilections. So far from being ruled out of order, the man who has been most outspoken about his particular "weltanschauung" has generally attracted the greatest popularity, because a credo is always more attractive than bare fact—unless (in Canada) that weltanschauung has been Christianity! I understand that it is explicitly stated in the statutes of at least one State-supported university in Canada that any professor openly advocating any brand of Christianity in the classroom will be subject to penalty, though neither Marxism nor any other contemporary religion is similarly debarred.

Here immediately hackles rise: why this sudden introduction of Christianity into the argument? is not this an article on religion-in-general in university curricula? why a special plea for Christianity? Brevity demands a staccato answer which I will preface by a bold statement of the second half of my thesis: because "religion" in its broadest sense comprehends the systematization of all men's norma-

tive judgements, courses in religion are an essential part of the curriculum of the Faculty of Arts of any modern university, and because Canada has been cradled in Christianity, which remains the religion of the great majority of her people, a study of Christianity should enjoy the lion's share of the courses offered in this department in a Canadian university.

It will be noted first that attempt is made to demand for Christianity an exclusive position; courses in Comparative Religion, or even in the larger universities detailed courses in other individual religions, should be given a place. Dialectical Materialism might well rank second only to Christianity as the religion with which practical considerations demand that educated Canadian citizens should be fully acquainted at this juncture in the world's history. But because Canada remains at least nominally a Christian country, because more of its citizens are eager to profess Christianity than any other religion, and because the texture of Canadian life, and of her social, political, and cultural institutions, proclaims so loudly a Christian origin, it is of prime importance the intellectual elite of the country should be given more opportunity than at present for an intelligent study of the history and content of this particular faith. There is no suggestion that any of the courses offered will be required courses, so that the charge of proselytisation cannot be levelled against any university which implements this suggestion. A growing number of American universities have, of course, already implemented it, and it is high time that Canadian universities also began to offer similar facilities. The Faculty of Arts and Science of Dalhousie-King's made a beginning two years ago, when the heading "Religion" found its way into the curriculum section of the Calendar. How far was this innovation noticed?

Immediately, of course, the objection will be raised that Christianity cannot be taught objectively because the teacher will always be either a non-Christian, and therefore one who has not experienced what he himself is trying to convey, or a member of some particular school of Christianity. Apart from the fact, already alluded to, that we quite happily allow Economics to be taught by free-traders (or even Marxists), Political Science by Progressive Conservatives, and Philosophy by logical positivists, are we deterred from allowing a course in Musical Appreciation to be taken for credit by the danger that the teacher may be a secret devotee of Rock 'n' Roll. It is true that all fully-

committed Christians are called to be propagandists, or, as they would prefer to say, missionaries for their Faith; it is NOT true that it is even difficult to find among their number many qualified and ready to play the rules of the academic game, and show no more bias in the teaching of their subject than is shown every day in most of the Arts courses in the calendar.

The matter is urgent. Man needs a faith to live by, which the study of facts alone cannot supply. Yet our civilization enshrines eternal values. It is high time that we recognize these values as worthy of the same careful study that we give to the more commonplace subjects of today.

NEWS BRIEFS

Friday evening saw the students of Pine Hill Residence held their 51st Annual "At Home." Faculty exhibits followed by a chicken dinner preceded the impressive coronation of Barbara Ferguson as Pine Hill Queen. The evening concluded with a variety show featuring local and imported talent.

The Pine Hill formal was held the following evening. Chaisson's orchestra provided the music for some 75 couples who concluded a very pleasant evening with a buffet supper. Chaperones were the faculty and officials of Pine Hill College.

The Joseph Howe Prize for poetry and the James DeMille Prize for prose are being offered for submissions of poetry and prose respectively.

Announcements setting out the regulations for these prizes are posted on various bulletin boards. The deadline date is March 31.

Catholic Judges and Lawyers will be the subject of a talk by the Rev. F. L. Melanson, P.P., J.C.L., on Sunday, February 23, 8:30 at Newman Hall, 38 Windsor Street.

The second meeting of the newly formed Spanish group will meet Wednesday, Feb. 19 at 8:00 p.m. in Room 212 of the Arts Building.

An interesting cultural and social program has been planned. Dr. F. Moya will play recorded selections of Cuban music and refreshments will be served. All new members and friends are welcome to attend.

For Sale: A racoon coat in perfect condition for \$25.00. Phone 82-3259 Bedford.

Wednesday, Feb. 19—8:00 p.m.—Dal Moot Court. Dal vs. St. Mary's Debate. "That the study of humanities be subordinate to the study of science."

Dal—Negative — Alex Weir, Law, Halifax; Alade Akesode, Law, Nigeria.

Judges: Mr. Justice Currie, Dr. (Mrs.) Kitz, Dr. Corston, Pine Hill.

AUSTRALIAN LECTURER

Professor A. D. Hope, who is at present completing a tour of Canadian universities will give two lectures on Monday and Wednesday, February 24 and 26 in Room 21 of the Arts building.

Professor Hope is Head of the Department of English, University College, Canberra, and is a well-regarded novelist and poet. The subject of his first lecture is "Culture and Letters in Australia"; of his second lecture, "The Australian Novel."

SEMI-FINALS
N. S. INTERCOLLEGIATE
HOCKEY
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Thursday and Saturday nights in the rink; two games, total points.

WHAT IS EDUCATION?

(form the Ubbsey)

There is a school of thought which claims that education is primarily the communication of knowledge and ideas from one generation to the next. Others might translate this by saying that it is passing on what is best in our culture to the rising generation. The implication is that teaching is clever instruction or even the easy understanding and ideas easy to understand. This outlook, however, tends to confuse true education with information. Furthermore, it would imply that almost all education could be obtained from books once a person has learned to read.

True education, however, is not primarily the acquisition of information or even the easy understanding of ideas and knowledge, for knowledge and information are but the raw material of education. The real educational process comes only

when the student is required or stimulated or caused to think deeply, actively and long about knowledge, information and ideas.

True education cannot be said to have been accomplished until the thinking person has developed ideas, convictions and attitudes of his own. As a result of diligent thinking through and clever experiment with acquired material an educated person must develop wisdom and virtue. He must be able to use and select information. He must be able to apply it.

Through intellectual effort and emotional appreciation he must absorb great ideas into his whole being so that he becomes a better person and a wiser citizen as a result of the diligent thought acquired through experience, experiment and curiosity, as well as from direct instruction and books.

A good teacher leaves his pupils with a desire to improve on the culture of the past and with an ardent desire to experiment. A constructive and creative outlook is the end product in education, but there is no easy way of making sure this develops in every pupil, no matter how well endowed by nature.

A true educative process is by no means easy. Lecturing and instruction are relatively easy for the instructor, but they are often hard on the listener. Lecturing is not very educative because the listener tends to be passive and absorbent only. Real education goes on most effectively when the student is active, creative and highly motivated.

A great deal of good teaching is a subtle indirect way of putting others in situations which challenge them to put forth their best efforts. Teaching relies heavily on example,

on ingenious devices and on the artistry of clever human relations. It does not demand the skills of the popular demagogic orator. Put in another way, a clever teacher asks searching questions, he does not necessarily supply pat answers.

A university educates its students by providing laboratories and libraries, seminar rooms and discussion centres, in addition to the stimulus, persuasion and inspiration of a distinguished and experimentally minded staff. It also tries to provide an atmosphere and facilities conducive to the interchange of ideas and arguments between students themselves. Disputation over coffee may cause more cerebral activity than copying notes from a factual lecture.

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